ゼロの使い魔5
〈トリスタニアの休日〉
ヤマグチノボル
MF文庫J

Novel Illustrations

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メディアファクトリー

ゼロの使い魔5　トリスタニアの休日

才人はある日突然異世界ハルケギニアに「召還」されてしまった高校生。元の世界に戻る方法を探しつつ、美少女魔法使い・ルイズのもとで使い魔として暮らしている。顔は可愛くても高飛車で意地っ張りなルイズとは、いつからかお互いを意識するようになったものの、すれ違ってばかり。そんな状態で迎えた夏休み、アンリエッタ女王に町の偵察を頼まれた才人とルイズは、下町の酒場で住み込みのアルバイトをはじめる。ルイズはプライドの高さから客を怒らせてばかりだが、店では客からもらうチップを競う「チップレース」が行われることに……（第一話）。今回は夏休みを舞台にした短編集。大人気のキュルケ＆タバサの出会い編も収録！

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ヤマグチノボルの本

グリーングリーン 鐘ノ音スタンド・バイ・ミー
［原作・監修／GROOVER　イラスト：くろたま商会］

ゼロの使い魔［イラスト：兎塚エイジ］

ゼロの使い魔2 風のアルビオン
［イラスト：兎塚エイジ］

ゼロの使い魔3 始祖の祈祷書
［イラスト：兎塚エイジ］

ゼロの使い魔4 誓約の水精霊
［イラスト：兎塚エイジ］

ゼロの使い魔5 トリスタニアの休日
［イラスト：兎塚エイジ］

ヤマグチノボル（やまぐち・のぼる）

1972年2月、茨城県生まれ。『カナリア～この想いを歌にのせて』（角川スニーカー文庫）でデヴュー。著書に『グリーングリーン鐘ノ音ファンタスティック』『つっぱれ有栖川』（共に角川スニーカー文庫）『描きかけのラブレター』（富士見ミステリー文庫）『グリングリーン鐘ノ音スタンド・バイ・ミー』（MF文庫J）など多数。小説連載も数多く手がけている（富士見ファンタジアバトルロイヤル等）。『グリーングリーン』『Gonna Be??』『ゆきうた』『私立アキハバラ学園』『魔界天使ジブリール』『そらうた』など、ゲームシナリオライターとしても活躍中。

Illustration

◎兎塚エイジ（うさつか・えいじ）

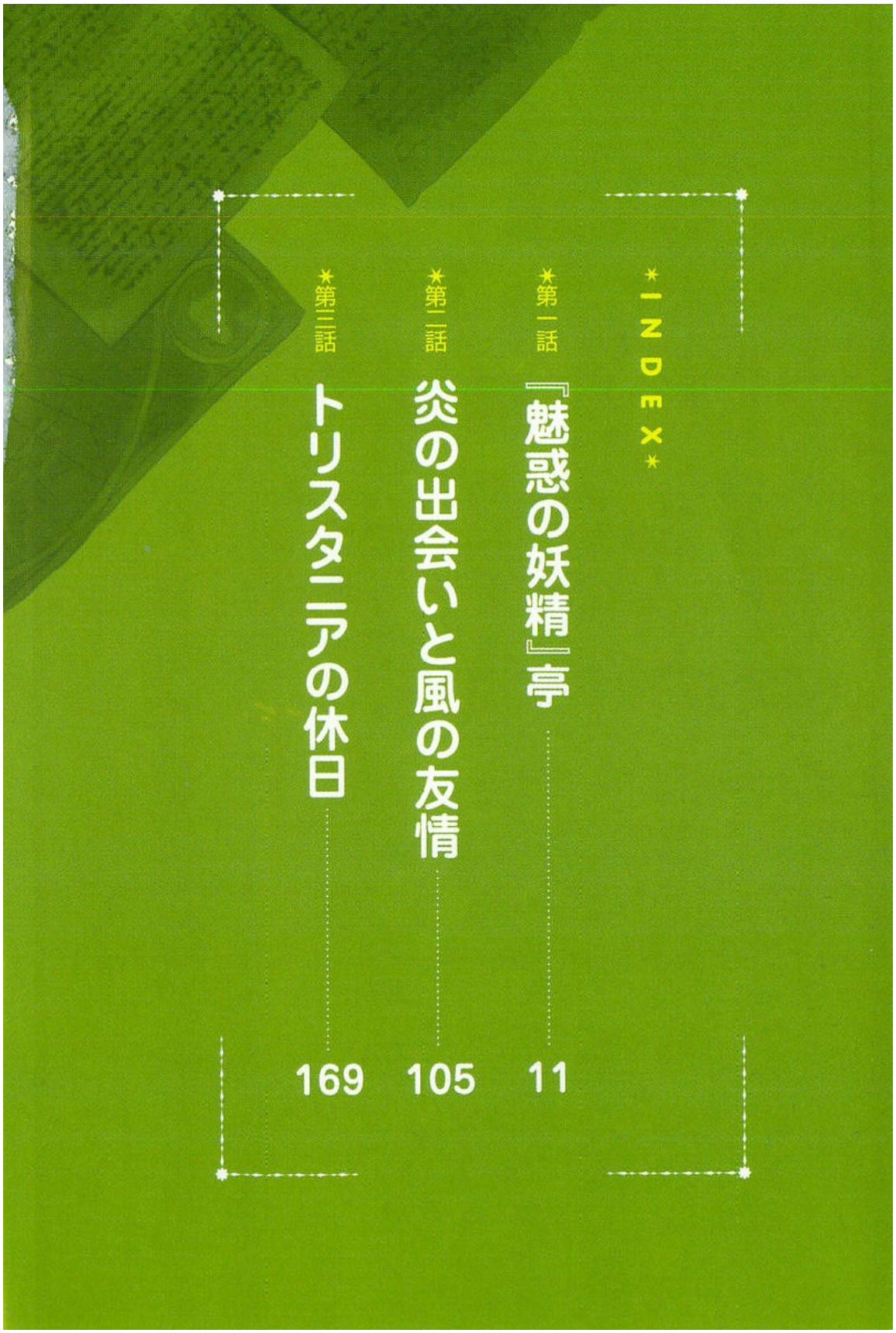
大阪出身、大阪在住の大阪人。8月16日生まれ。
現在、サラリーマンをしながらイラストを描かせて頂いてます。
今までの参加作品は「道士さまといっしょ」（電撃文庫）です。

カバーイラスト／兎塚エイジ　装丁／blue

ゼロの使い魔 5

〈トリスタニアの休日〉

ヤマグチノボル



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アンリエッタ女王
トリステインの女王様。
最愛の人を亡くしたあとも、気丈に
ふるまっている。
微熱のキュルケ
「火」系統の魔法を得意とする。
タバサとは、性格が正反対ながら、
親友同士。
雪風のタバサ
「風」系統の魔法を得意とする。
本が好きで無口な少女。
ゼロのルイズ
伝説の系統「虚無」を操る。
誇り高く意地っ張りだが、時にちょ
っと才人を認めはじめた。
サイト（平賀才人）
ルイズの使い魔「ガンダールヴ」は
あらゆる武器を扱うことができる
が、普段は好奇心旺盛なフツーの
高校生。
ジェシカ
通称「慈悲の妖精」亭の娘。
明るい性格で、店のウェイトレスの
まとめ役。

ゼロの使い魔5
トリスタニアの休日

ヤマグチノボル

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Story 1: The "Charming Fairies" Inn

Chapter 1

"Alright, starting tomorrow is summer break."

Louise said, while looking down at the familiar.

"Yeah, it is."

Saito tumbled on the ground, facing his master.

"How about we have one week of leisure?"

They were at the Austri Plaza. As always, Saito was being stepped on by Louise, and he, once again had to explain his reason for why he was being stepped on by Louise.

"Well, Siesta said that she would go on a trip to Tarbes village. Wouldn't it be okay if I just stayed a little bit and then went back to your territory? Sometimes it's not bad with just your family and no one else around, right?"

But, judging from the look on Louise's face, it seemed that the suggestion was rejected again.

The front gate, which was filled with students going home, could be seen from the plaza. The students, who had waited days to go home, were riding by carriage. They were going back to their hometown, being encouraged by their parents to return to the capital of Tristania. Tristain Academy of Magic would be on a long summer vacation starting from tomorrow. It would be a two and a half month long holiday.

"You-you know, Miss Vallière. I think Saito-san needs a break as well."

A flustered Siesta said to Louise, who was bullying Saito. As preparations for returning home, Siesta was not wearing her usual maid uniform, but her casual clothes of a dark green shirt and brown skirt.

Louise threw a glare at her. But... Siesta was also not the same. With the competitive spirit of a girl in love, she glared at Louise in return.

"A-a break is also necessary, right? You-you always work him as you please..., that's horrible."

"This guy is fine. That's because he's my familiar."

Siesta seemed to have sensed something in that attitude.

"Familiar? Heh, I wonder if that's the only reason...?"

Siesta muttered. Her eyes glittered, as if she was setting up a trap to catch a rabbit. Girls in love are sensitive to rivals.

"Eh? What does that mean?"

"No-nothing?"

Siesta muttered while playing dumb.

"Say it."

"It's just that recently, the way you look at Saito-san has been a bit suspicious. That's what I thought."

Siesta said, finishing by looking to the side. Louise glared at her intensely.

Even a maid is making fun of me. It's Saito's fault. Even though he's a commoner, he does all sorts of strange things. Even the academy's commoners are starting to get overconfident. Louise had heard such rumors before, but this is what it was. The kingdom's authority. The nobles' authority. *Well, that doesn't really matter but my authority!*

Louise trembled while twitching.

Siesta, who squinted her eyes because of the brilliant shine of the sunlight sighed "fuuh", exposed her breasts, and wiped her sweat with a handkerchief.

"Really... Summer is so hot."

Like a flower blooming in the wild, lots of charm poured out from there. Amazing when undressed, the chasm of the two hills flew into her eyes. Louise gave a "Ha-!" and looked at Saito's face. Underneath her foot, the familiar was desperately leering at the gap of Siesta's exposed shirt. Louise was about to snap but endured it.

Like I'll lose! That's right, I'm a noble. Even if I remain silent, nobility will pour out from the gaps of my shirt.

Louise followed suit. She murmurs "Fuuh, it's hot." and loosened her shirt's buttons. And then she wiped her sweat with a handkerchief. But... what was there was not a chasm, but a refreshing plain that spread out everywhere.

Saito seemed to prefer the terrain with highs and lows and did not move his glance.

Seeing the result of the battle, Siesta let out a stifled laugh, making Louise snap.

"Wh-what! You just laughed right now!"

"What? There's no way I would laugh. No way, right? For me to look at a noble and laugh..."

Siesta said, pacifying Louise with a sparkling face. Then she turned her face away and muttered

"...With such a childish body, a noble? ...Heeh."

"Kaha," leaked out of Louise mouth as exhalation.

"What did you just say?! Hey!"

"...Who knows, ...nothing. Either way, it's so hot. Hot, hot. Aah, it's hot."

Louise trembled all over. Saito whispered,

"Hey, master."

"What?"

"Is it okay if I go to Tarbes?"

"Kauha," Louise sighed miserably, and began to hurt Saito with all her might, thinking *How many times are you going to ask?*

Siesta said, "Calm down! Miss Vallière! Please calm down!" and grabbed her back. While the usual mess was about to begin...

*flap**flap* as one owl appeared.

"Nn?"

The owl stopped on Louise's shoulder and hit Louise's head with it's wings.

"What is with this owl?"

The owl was biting on a letter. Louise took that from it. Recognizing the stamp pressed on it, Louise returned to a serious expression.

"What is this owl?"

Siesta peeked at it.

When Louise became serious, Saito inquired,

"What is it?"

Checking it contents, Louise scanned over the single piece of paper. Then Louise said, "Going back home is halted."

"What do you mean halted? Siesta even invited me... I'm really disappointed, you know."

Saito said, seeing Louise go back to her own room and check her luggage that she had packed up for going back home.

Louise showed Saito the letter the owl had brought just now.

"No, I can't read the letters from here."

Louise sat straight on her bed and began to talk.

"After the previous incident... you know that Princess-sama was depressed,

right?"

Saito nodded. It was a tragic event. Her own dead lover... was revived by her enemy and tried to kidnap her. It was obvious she would be depressed.

"I feel sorry for her... but it seems she can't stay sunk in the abyss of sadness forever."

"What do you mean?"

Louise explained what was written in the letter.

Albion had given up on a proper invasion until their fleet was rebuilt, so they were trying to fight in an irregular way- Is what the cabinet had predicted, with Mazarin on the top of them. They couldn't have them cowardly attack Tristain from the inside by inciting revolt and rebellion throughout the town. Because Henrietta and her men feared such conspiracies, she was strengthening the maintenance of public order...

"It's fine to strengthen the public order, but what does she want you to do?"

"An intelligence gathering mission involving hiding myself. Is there any improper actions going on? What kind of rumors are being spread around by commoners?"

"Uwah, a spy!"

"Spy?"

"In my world, those type of information gathering jobs are called that."

"Huunn... Anyways, it's basically spying, right..."

For some reason, Louise looked unsatisfied.

"What's wrong?"

"Well... because isn't this plain?"

"No, isn't information important? My grandfather said that the old Japan lost a war because they kept on ignoring information."

"What?"

"Nothing. It doesn't really matter..."

In Henrietta's letter, there were directions to settle down at an inn in Tristania, hide her identity and do something like flower-selling, and collect all kinds of information being passed around by commoners. A note to pay back the expenses for the mission was enclosed.

"I see."

"That's why I'm rearranging my luggage. I can't bring so many clothes."

Louise pointed to her luggage that had gotten lighter by a bagful.

"So I have to work even though it's summer vacation..."

Saito muttered sadly.

"Stop loafing around. Come on, we're leaving now!"

After all of this happened, the two left for Tristania. In order to hide their social status, they could not use a coach. The horses at the academy were the academy's, so they could not use those. In the end, they walked.

Louise and Saito walked on the road under the scorching sun, heading towards Tristania. It took two days to get there.

Looking reproachfully at the sun, Saito whispered,

"Damn... even though I should be at Siesta's house drinking cold water right now..."

"Don't complain! Come on! Walk!"

Louise, who had her familiar carry all of the luggage, shouted angrily.

After arriving at the city, the two first visited the financial affairs office to exchange the note for gold coins. Six-hundred in new gold coins. Four-hundred écus.

Saito remembered the money from Henrietta in the pouch attached to his belt. About four hundred new gold coins remained. So around two-hundred seventy écus.

Saito first found a tailor and bought plain clothes for Louise. Louise didn't like it, but wearing a mantle with a pentagram would completely expose her as a noble. It would be impossible to blend in with commoners and gather information. There would be no meaning walking here.

But Louise, forced to wear plain clothes, looked unsatisfied.

"What's wrong?"

"It's not enough."

"What is?"

"The money we got for this mission. With only four-hundred écus, we would be broke after buying a horse."

"We don't need a horse. It was written for you to hide your social status, right? In other words, you're supposed to act like a commoner. Walk. You have legs."

"I'll act like a commoner, but I can't get satisfying services without a horse."

"A cheap horse is fine, right? Compromise here."

"Those horses are useless when we really need them! We also need a harness. And also... we won't be able to stay at a strange inn. With this amount of money, it'll be gone after staying for just two and a half months!"

What kind of Inn could cost up to six-hundred gold coins?

"A cheap inn is fine, right?"

"No way! I can't sleep well in a cheap room!"

As expected of a noble's daughter. Even though she has a mission to blend in with commoners and gather information, she plans to stay at a high class inn. Saito wondered, *What is she thinking?*

"I have some too. I'll share some with you."

"...That's still not enough. Services cost money."

"Then what should we do?"

"Isn't there a way to earn more money?"

And like that, while disputing about earning more money and finding a cheap place, they entered a bar where Saito found a gambling area set up in a corner of the store. Over there, drunk men and suspicious women were taking chips and having their chips taken.

Without caring about Louise narrowing her eyebrows at them, Saito gazed at the gambling.

"What are you looking at?"

"Well, I was just thinking about earning money with this. How about it?"

"Isn't that gambling? What a thing!"

"Now, just watch me. I've done it a lot of times before in games."

Saito exchanged chips for thirty new gold coins... twenty écus and headed towards the table with the spinning disk. The disk's circumference was split into thirty-seven parts, each having their own number and colored red or black.

An iron ball spun around inside the disk. And near the disk, there were men and women with changed eye colors staring at this intently.

It was roulette.

Saito looked at the placing guests. *First, I'll test my luck*. Copying the winning guests, Saito placed a chip worth about ten écus on red.

The ball entered a red pocket.

"See, look. I earned some! I'm amazing!"

Saito was somewhat stingy, so he placed cautiously and earned about thirty écus

worth of chips.

"See, look! The money we have for completing the mission increased! Geez, it's a big difference compared to a certain someone who only complains!"

Saito said while turning his chest away. Louise's eyes flashed.

"Lend some to me."

"You shouldn't. It's impossible for you."

"What are you saying? If the familiar is winning, then the master will win ten times over if she tries."

Louise immediately placed what Saito had won on black. But... she was off. What Saito had won was lost in a moment.

"What are you doing?! Even though I finally earned some!"

"Sh-shut up."

"Geez... Even though you always act proud, you can't properly earn money at all. Learn from Siesta a bit. Learn to cook something. Then go work as a cook at some restaurant. That's what laboring is."

Something lit up in Louise at the words "Learn from Siesta".

"J-j-just watch me. Who the hell will lose?"

"Louise?"

Saito trembled at her.

Thirty minutes later...

Louise was drooping her shoulders and looking hatefully at the board. The chips she had placed a moment ago quietly disappeared by the banker's hand. The pretty blond girl's shoulders remained drooping for a while, but then raising her head proudly, she tried to place all of her chips onto one point. Saito, who had been looking from behind her, grabbed her shoulders.

"Louise..."

"What?"

Louise muttered in a clearly grumpy voice. Saito bluntly said,

"Let's stop already."

"I'll win next time. I'll definitely win."

"How many times do you think you've said that?!"

Saito's scream resounded. The guests placing chips turned around and put on bitter smiles.

It was a scene that occurred every day.

"You haven't even won once."

Saito stuck his finger in front of Louise's nose. This was the first time Saito saw a human who was so bad at gambling. Louise had already lost four-hundred écus... most of the money required for the mission. If they turned Louise's remaining chips into money, they wouldn't get more than thirty écus. If they lost this, they would be broke.

"It's okay. I'll unleash my certain winning method next."

"Tell me about it."

"Until now, I've been betting on red or black, right?"

"Yeah. To miss fifteen times betting on red or black... you'd be better off dead."

"Shut up. Listen? In that case, if I won, I only get a few times more. Why?"

"That's normal."

"And then I realized it. Even if I get red or black right, I only win double. But..."

"But, what?"

Saito was shaking. Louise was speaking as if possessed by something.

"If I win by numbers, I get thirty-five times my bet. I'll be able to get back what we lost plus more. I should have done this in the first place!"

"That's your certain winning method?"

Louise gave a big nod.

Saito silently grabbed Louise's arm and pulled.

"What are you doing?"

"The probability of you winning is one in thirty-seven!"

"So what?! I've already lost fifteen times. No matter how you think about it, I'll win next time. It'd be weird if I didn't. If I'm going to win, I might as well win big!"

Louise's reddish-brown eyes were glittering. It reminded him of the eyes of his uncle, who had failed at stocks and had run away at night. He had these eyes the last time Saito saw him.

On that day, the stock he said would rise greatly crashed downwards instead.

"Calm down. Let's exchange your chips for money and use it to find a place to stay. Okay?"

"No. If I left while losing, the name of La Vallière would weep."

"Let something like that weep!"

The moment he yelled that, he was kicked precisely between the legs and rolled onto the floor.

"Hoaaaaaa... do you have some grudge against my miserable area?"

After eliminating her bothersome familiar, Louise turned back toward the roulette disk.

The shooter was about the throw the ball onto the wheel. She could still make

the bet.

Louise placed all of her remaining chips onto the number that she had in her head a moment ago.

Then she stared at the wheel and ball with eyes that couldn't be more serious.

Making a clip-clop sound, the ball of fate entered a pocket. Louise's expression glittered with hope for a moment, but it changed into despair right away. The pocket was the one beside the number Louise had bet on.

While rubbing his nether regions, Saito got up and pulled on Louise.

"Let's go."

"What are you saying?"

"Heh?"

"My neighbor's pocket. Next, it's going to visit my house."

"We don't have any money left to bet, right?!"

"The money in your pocket will help."

"Idiot! This is my money!"

Saito covered his pouch. He couldn't have this be gambled. If he did, even he would be broke.

"You know? The familiar's things are the master's things. That's obvious."

"Don't joke around!"

But compared to Siesta, it didn't reach the ears of Louise, whose brain had been burnt by her fervor for gambling. She tried to kick Saito's nether regions at lightning speed. But Saito was different from usual. He quickly closed his two legs and guarded. Then he grabbed Louise's raised ankle.

"Like I'll let you kick me again!"

Louise muttered in a cold voice

"Vasra."

The magic restriction tool enveloped Saito's body and let off a electric current.

Convulsing violently, Saito tumbled back onto the floor.

"...I see, I didn't watch out for that."

Saito said weakly while cursing his curiosity. *Aah, if I didn't have interest in this gambling area, something like this wouldn't have...*

Louise searched Saito's pouch, took all of the remaining gold coins, and quickly exchanged them for chips. Saito was slightly relieved. Even if it's someone like Louise who has zero talent for gambling, she wouldn't lose all of those chips before his body recovered from the numbness. After the numbness were gone, he'll cover Louise's mouth and leave the place without letting her say anything. That is what Saito decided.

"Betting on one place won't work, it seems. I'll return to the basics."

"That's right... Red and black. Only a small amount on red and black. At least do that..."

"To show my respect for my loyal familiar, I'll bet on that hair and eye color."

"Black?"

"That's right." Nodding, Louise placed coins on black.

All of it... Two-hundred and seventy écus worth of chips, all of it.

Saito almost leaked.

"S! T! O! P!"

Louise smiled brightly at Saito.

"Silly. Even if the payoff is double, money is money. If I win, we'll get back all that we've lost plus more. What's more, just once. We only have to win one

time."

"P! L! E! A! S! E!"

"I should have done this in the first place."

The shooter spun the roulette. The small ball began to spin, holding the master and familiar's huge fate on it.

Making a dry sound, the ball spun on top of the wheel. The rotation slowly lost speed and, as if to divide fate, aimed for the right pocket. Louise had bet a large sum of money on black, so the other guests had bet on red. The only one betting on black was Louise. It entered red, left it, then it entered black, left it... Louise spoke as if she had caught a fever.

"I'm a legend. I'll never lose, right, at a place like this."

And then the ball entered a pocket... and stopped.

Louise closed her eyes without thinking.

Around her, sighs of sadness leaked out.

"...Eh?"

Everyone besides Louise had placed on red. The sighs came from them. In other words, the ones that placed on red lost. Which means...

"I really am the user of 'Zero' after all!"

Shouting that, Louise opened her eyes. Right afterwards, her mouth gaped open.

The ball... did not enter black or red, but the single existing green pocket. On the center of the pocket..., as if to give blessing to Louise, the number "0" was glittering there.

Saito and Louise were sitting in a daze at the corner of the sunsetting city's central plaza.

The bell at the church of Saint Rémy rang six at evening.

They were tired and hungry but had no place to go.

Louise was wearing the plain, brown one-piece Saito had bought earlier. On her feet were crude wooden shoes. Her mantle and wand were placed inside the bag Saito was carrying. Just from her clothes, she looked like some country girl, but thanks to her high-class face and her pink-blonde hair, she gave off a mismatched feeling similar to that of a destitute girl in the middle of a play.

Saito was wearing his usual clothes, but because he could not walk around the city with a drawn sword, he wrapped Derflinger in some cloth and carried him on the back. Louise muttered quietly in a way showing that she had realized just how troublesome of a deed she had done.

"Wh-what should we do?"

Saito glared at Louise

"I'll never let you carry money around again."

"Uuu..."

Louise moaned sadly, hugging her knees.

"Well, what should we do. Money. If we can't find an inn to stay at, we won't be able to eat food. What about the mission? O' mighty, mighty court lady of Her Majesty, please teach this humble familiar. Please?"

Saito said with plenty of spite. Even his money was used. He'll have her pay him back properly someday, but right now was the immediate problem of an inn and food to eat.

"I'm thinking about it right now."

Louise said with a sullen face.

"Let's obediently lower our heads to Princess-sama and get some more money."

"That's impossible. Princess-sama gave me this secret mission at her own discretion. The cabinet probably would not let the money pass. She probably can't use more than she freely has. Probably, that was already the best she could

do."

"You threw away that money in thirty minutes. What were you thinking?"

"That's because I can't get satisfying services with just four-hundred!"

"That's because you always want luxuries!"

"They're necessary!"

"Then, how about that? Contact your home. Yeah, hey, Duke-sama."

"Not possible. It's a secret mission. I can't tell my family either."

While hugging her knees, Louise rested her chin on it.

She really is a young mistress ignorant of the world's ways... She can't even properly shop for something. Even Saito, who came from another world, could haggle better. Nothing will get done letting her do things.

But he couldn't think of a good idea. He gazed at the plaza's fountain dazedly, but...

"Nn?"

He realized the passing people were gazing impressed at Louise.

Even if she didn't want to, Louise's loveliness and nobleness attracted attention. Especially if she was hugging her knees looking like a village girl. The people stole glances at Louise with a look that said "She probably ran away from some playhouse." Saito got up in a flash.

Louise was surprised.

"What's wrong?"

Ignoring Louise's words, Saito faced the people in the street and started stating

"Eeh- Ladies and Gentlemen!"

The passing people stopped, wondering what was going on.

"Eeh- This girl here is a wolf-girl that escaped from the circus."

"What?"

What is this guy saying?

"Being raised by wolves, she howls and barks! It's really troublesome! But the most amazing thing is that she can scratch her neck with her feet! Now stand by! She will scratch her neck with her foot right now!"

Saito whispered to Louise quietly

"Well, scratch your neck with your foot. Come on."

Saito taunted her with his chin. Louise stomped on that face with the sole of her foot. Saito tumbled onto the ground.

"What are you thinking?! Y-y-you want me to act like a beast?!"

Saito also got up, pulled on Louise's arm, and shouted

"We have no choice but to perform, right?! Is there any other way to earn money?! Aah?!"

Violently swinging her hair, Louise began arguing with Saito. "She really is a wolf-girl."

The audience was oddly satisfied.

But soon realizing it was just a quarrel, the audience quickly got bored and left. They didn't get anything. His strength left him and Saito laid down on the ground. Louise was also tired and quickly lost her physical strength, so she sat on his back.

"I'm hungry..."

"Me too..."

To these two sitting like this, someone tossed a copper coin. Saito jumped up and picked it up. Louise stood up with an enraged voice.

"Who is it?! Come out now!"

After saying that, a strange man came out of the crowd.

"Oh my... I thought you were beggars..."

Oddly, he talked in a feminine way.

"Haah? State yourself! You know, I, amazingly enough, am from a Duke's family..."

When she tried to say that, Saito stood up and covered Louise's mouth.

"Duke's family?"

"It-it's nothing! Yes! Her brain's just a bit like that. Yes."

Muffled, Louise thrashed around, but Saito ignored that and continued to cover her mouth. If they stood out anymore, it wouldn't be a secret mission anymore.

The man looked very interestedly at Saito and Louise. He was wearing rather showy clothes. Guiche's clothes were showy too, but the vector was strangely different. Black hair covered in oil, a sparkling, violet satin-earth shirt opened up at the chest with disheveled chest hair poking out, under his nose was a magnificent split chin and had a stylish mustache. A strong scent of perfume reached Saito's nose.

"Then why are you sleeping on the ground?"

"Well, we don't have a place to sleep or eat..."

"But we're not beggars."

Louise said bluntly. The man looked deeply at Louise's face.

"I see. Well then, come to my place. My name is Scarron. I run an inn. I'll prepare a room."

The man said that smiling. The way he talked and dressed was gross, but he seemed like a generous person. Saito's face glittered.

"Really?!"

"Yep, but there's one condition."

"I'll do anything."

"I'm managing a store on the first floor. This girl will help. That is the condition. Okay?"

Louise looked reluctant, but she obediently nodded when Saito stared at her.

"Très bien."

Scarron grouped his hands together and rest them on his cheek, and narrowing his lips, smiled. He acted like a gay. Actually, he couldn't be anything but a gay. Gross. There are gays in other worlds too... And there's that "très bien"... Saito became strangely depressed.

"Then it's decided. Follow me."

The man started walking, swinging his hips as if to a rhythm. Saito reluctantly took Louise's hand and followed.

"I kind of don't want to. He's weird."

Saito looked at Louise with blazing anger in his eyes.

"Do you think you're in a position to choose?"

Chapter 2

"Good words! Fairies!"

Scarron said as he moved his hips while looking around the store.

"Yes! Mr. Scarron!"

Cheered the girls wrapped in flashy clothes.

"Wroooooongg!"

Scarron shouted while exaggeratedly moving his hips around, upon hearing the girls' cheers.

"Not Mister, but call me as Mi Mademoiselle, alright?"

"Yes! Mi mademoiselle!"

"Très bien."

Scarron trembled pleasantly while moving his hips. Looking at the middle-aged man that took him here, Saito felt sick.

But the girls in the store, who were used to this habit, didn't even show a change in their faces.

"All right, we'll start with a saddening notice from Mi Mademoiselle. Recently, the 'Charming Faeries' Inn's sales have been dropping. A shop called a 'cafe' has been bringing out 'tea' that has been recently imported from the East and are stealing our customers... Sniff..."

"Don't cry! Mi mademoiselle!"

"You're right. If we lost to this 'tea', the words 'Charming Faeries' would cry."

"Yes! Mi mademoiselle!"

Scarron jumped onto the table and posed intensely.

"The Charming Faeries' promise! Un~~"

"Serve with a cheerful smile!"

"The Charming Faeries' promise! Deux~~"

"A clean, sparkling store interior!"

"The Charming Faeries' promise! Trois~~"

"Receive lots of tips!"

"Très bien."

Scarron smiled in a satisfied way. Then he bent his hips and made a pose. Gastric juice went up his throat, but Saito desperately swallowed it back down.

"Well then, I have a wonderful announcement for you faeries. We get to make a new comrade today."

The girls applauded.

"Then, let me introduce her! Louise-chan! Come in here!"

Surrounded by applause, Louise appeared, completely red in the face from shyness and anger.

Saito swallowed his breath. The store's hairdresser had put up Louise's pink-blonde hair and made the hair on her left and right into small braided cords. She was also wearing a suggestively short camisole, sticking to her like a corset and making her body's lines more pronounced. It was open at the back, letting off an obvious charm. That appearance was very much like a lovely fairy.

"Louise-chan was about to be sold off to the circus, but just in time managed to escape with her brother. She's very cute but poor girl."

Sighs of sympathy came from the girls. That was a lie that Saito had come up

with along their way to the store. In desperation, he had decided to be Louise's older brother. They didn't look like siblings no matter how one looked, but Scarron didn't get too caught up in that part. It seems it didn't really matter.

"Well then, Louise-chan. Greet the faeries that are going to become your co-workers." Louise was shaking all over. It seemed she was angry. Intensely. Strongly. A prideful noble like Louise was being told to bow her head to commoners in that clothing. Saito was afraid she'd go berserk and let off continuous "Explosion"s.

But... The sense of responsibility telling her to fulfill the mission suppressed Louise's anger.

Come to think about it, rumors tend to collect at bars. It was perfect for information gathering. Plus, they were broke. Telling herself this was a mission, Louise bowed with a forced smile.

"I-I-I-I'm Louise. Ni-ni-ni-nice to meet you."

"Okay, applause!"

Scarron demanded. A great applause echoed through the store. Scarron looked at the clock set on the wall. It was finally time for the store to open.

He snapped his fingers. Reacting to it, the magic-made dolls at the corner of the store began to play gaudy music. It was the rhythm to a march. Scarron talked in an excited voice.

"Now! Time to open!"

The feather doors opened with a "bam" as the waiting customers crowded into the store.

The "Charming Faeries" Inn that Saito and Louise arrived at looked like just a bar, but it was actually a popular store where cute girls in suggestive clothing brought customers their drinks. Scarron had noticed Louise's beauty and loveliness and brought her here to work as a waitress.

Given an apron with the store's embroidery on it, Saito was given the job of washing dishes. As long as he was living at the inn, he had to do some work.

The store was thriving, so mountains of tableware were delivered to him.

It seemed that no matter where someone was, even in another world, dish washing was a job for newcomers. Saito did not want to wash dishes from that gay man's store, but he endured it.

It was for the sake of Louise's mission. She was lacking, selfish, strong-willed, and an arrogant little girl that never listened to what he said, but it couldn't be helped since he had fallen for her. Despite all of her complaining, it seemed like she was trying hard this time to succeed in information gathering. And also, Henrietta's sad face he saw on Ragdorian Lake's shores... He wanted to do something for that pitiful princess. If he could help the people he liked by doing what he could, he wouldn't mind searching for a way back to his world later. Though a bundle of troublesomeness, his simplicity had himself think that way.

Saito grappled with the dishes. But everything has a "limit". After a while, he could no longer move his tired hands. But even if he became exhausted, the amount of plates he had to wash wouldn't disappear and started to pile up.

A showy-looking girl appeared near Saito, who was just blankly looking at the mountain of plates while tired senseless in front of the sink. The cute girl had long, straight black hair. Her thick eyebrows let off a lively aura. It seemed that she was close to Saito in age. Saito quickly snapped out of it when his eyes fell upon the cleavage of her breasts which appeared from her green one-piece that opened up at the chest.

"Hey! We don't have any plates left!"

She shouted, resting her arms on her waist.

"I-I'm sorry! Right away!"

Being used to getting ordered around by cute girls, Saito jumped right up and reflexively started to wash the dishes. Seeing the inexperienced way he moved his hands, the black-haired girl tilted her head.

"Let me see them."

Saying that, she took the cloth used for dish washing out of Saito's hands and began scrubbing in an experienced manner. With smooth movements that did not have any wastefulness in them, the plates were gradually cleaned up. Saito realized there was a secret to dish washing.

"It takes time to polish one side at a time, right? You can put both sides in-between with the cloth like this and then scrub really hard."

"Amazing," Saito said. Seeing that he really was impressed, the girl smiled.

"I'm Jessica. You're that new girl's brother, right? Your name?"

"Saito. Hiraga Saito."

"That's a strange name."

"Leave it alone."

Saito began washing dishes with Jessica. After looking around her surroundings, she whispered to Saito in a small voice.

"Hey, that thing about you being siblings with Louise was a lie, right?"

"Nope. 100% genuine older brother and younger sister."

Saito said stiffly.

"You two's hair color, eye color, and face shape are completely different. There isn't anybody who would believe you."

Saito was speechless.

"Though it doesn't matter. The girls here are all fine with any reason. There isn't a person here who would pry into someone's past. Relax."

"I-I see..."

Jessica stared into Saito's eyes. For a moment, he was startled.

"But can you secretly just tell me? Just what is the relationship between you two? Did you run away from somewhere?"

It seemed Jessica tended to be just as curious as Saito sometimes was. She looked at Saito excitedly. But there was no way he could tell the truth.

Saito glanced at Jessica's showy outfit. She was probably one of the "fairy" waitresses. Unneeded prying was bothersome, so Saito waved his hands to make her go away.

"Is it okay for you to be slacking here? You have your own work to do. Go and carry some wine or ale. Manager Scarron will get mad at you."

"It's okay for me."

"Why?"

"Because I'm Scarron's daughter."

Saito dropped a plate. Making a shattering sound, the plate was scattered into pieces.

"Ah! What are you breaking?! You're going to pay from your wages!"

"Daughter?"

"That's right."

For such a cute daughter to be born from that gay store manager... Saito wondered what genes thought they were doing.

"Come on! Don't just talk and start moving your hands! The store's going to get busier from now on!"

Saito had some hardships, but Louise was suffering much worse.

"...H-here is your order."

Desperately trying to smile... she left a bottle of wine and a ceramic glass on the table. In front of her, a man was looking at Louise while smiling vulgarly.

"Little girl, pour me some."

Me pour alcohol for a commoner, a commoner, a commoner? A noble like me? A noble like me? A noble like me?

Such humiliating thoughts spun around in her head.

"Anh? What's wrong? Didn't I tell you to hurry and pour me some?"

Louise exhaled and tried to calm herself down.

This is a mission. This is a mission. Information gathering while disguised as commoners. Information gathering...

Muttering that like a spell, she somehow managed to smile.

"We-well then, I'll pour some for you."

"Huun..."

Louise picked up the bottle and started to slowly pour the wine into the man's glass.

But... Because she was shaking from anger, she missed and spilled the wine on the man's shirt.

"Uwah! You spilled it!"

"I-I'm sor.....ry."

"Like an apology is going to help!"

Then the man began to stare at Louise.

"You... don't have any breasts, but you're considerably pretty."

The feeling of blood left Louise's face.

"I've taken a liking to you. Maybe I'll have you feed me mouth-to-mouth. Then I'll forgive you! Gahaha!"

Louise picked up the bottle, drank the wine into her mouth, and spat it back out onto the man's face.

"What are you doing, you brat?!"

"Bam!"

Placing one leg on the table, Louise looked down at the seated man.

For a moment, the man winced at the intensity released from this little girl.

"L-l-l-lowlife. Wh-wh-wh-who do you think I am?"

"Wh-what?"

"F-f-f-for your information, d-d-d.....duk..."

At the moment she was about to say "duke family", Louise was sent flying from behind.

"I'm~~ sorry~~!"

It was Scarron. Sitting down beside the man, he started to wipe the man's shirt with the dish cloth in his hand.

"Wh-what's with you, you gay bastard... I don't need you..."

"This won't do! It's soaked in wine! Hey, Louise-chan! Bring along some new wine! While she's fetching it, mi mademoiselle will keep you company!"

Scarron leaned closely to the man. The man looked like he wanted to cry, but Scarron held him back with superhuman strength and couldn't move.

"Ye-yes!" Louise said, finally snapping back to reality, and ran into the kitchen.

"Eh-, well then, thanks for the hard work!"

When the store closed, the sky had started to whiten. Saito and Louise were standing there unsteadily. They were so tired, they felt like they were going to die. They were completely exhausted doing a job that they were not accustomed to.

"You all worked your best, it seems. We're in the green this month."

Scarron started handing out the wages to the girls that worked in his store and the cooks in the kitchen, who were all letting out shouts of joy.

It seemed today was payday.

"Here, Louise-chan, Saito-kun."

Thinking "We're getting some too?", Saito and Louise's faces lit up for a

moment, but... the only thing in it was one thin scrap of paper.

"What is this?"

Saito asked. The smile from Scarron's face disappeared.

"A bill. Saito-kun, how many plates did you break? Louise-chan, how many customers did you anger?"

Louise and Saito looked at each other and sighed.

"It's okay. Everyone makes mistakes at the beginning. Just try your best from now on and pay back the bill."

And... the sighing didn't stop after that.

The room given to Louise and Saito was reached by following a corridor lined up with the guest room door... and using a ladder to climb up and reach the attic.

No matter how you saw it, it wasn't a room that was made for people to live in. Being dusty and dim, it seemed to have been used as a storage room. Broken cabinets and chairs, wooden cases holding wine bottles, and barrels... All kinds of objects were piled up. A rough, wooden bed had been placed there. When Louise sat, her legs gave in which caused her to flop right down.

"What is this?!"

"A bed, right?"

While wiping away a spider's nest, Saito opened the small window. Doing so, the bats that seemed to live in the antic flew in screeching and hung onto a beam.

"What's that?!"

"Probably our roommates."

Saito said with a calm voice.

"You want a noble like me to sleep here?!" Louise screamed angrily.

Saito silently picked up the blanket on top of the bed and cleared away the dust. Then he laid down and put the blanket on himself.

"Come on, let's sleep. Scarron-san already said it. I wake up at noon and prepare the store. You're going to clean the store."

"Why are you fine with this?!"

"It's not much different from the way a certain someone usually treats me."

Saying that, Saito, probably because he was tired, quickly fell asleep.

Louise moaned "uu~" and "mu~", but she gave up after a while and snuggled in with Saito. Worming around, she placed her head on Saito's arm.

It was definitely a horrible place... but there was one thing to be happy about.

That maid wasn't here.

Geez, I don't know, what's so good, about this, familiar! That maid that likes Saito isn't here. That is honestly very wonderful. I-, don't really, like-, this but... Louise muttered in a slightly happy mood, moving her cheek near Saito and closing her eyes.

Blushing, she whispered, "I'll have you treat me kindly during this summer holiday."

And also... pick up the rumors in the city and give detailed reports to Princess-sama. Thinking that it was going to get busy soon, Louise fell asleep.

But.

Louise's little bit of happiness was splendidly crushed. The cause was the night of the next day. The "Charming Faeries" Inn was thriving that day too. Louise was wearily carrying food or drinks out just like the previous day.

The drunken men had two types of reactions when they saw Louise.

First were the people that looked at Louise, who was small at various parts of her

body, and said "This store is using kids?" angrily. To these customers, Louise served them plenty of wine. She had them drink the bottle too.

On the other side, there were the customers that had special interests.

Only Louise's outer appearance was idiotically cute, so in reverse, it was a wonderful thing to people with this line of thought. These people underestimated Louise because she looked obedient when she was quiet and reached their hands out towards her small butt or thighs. To those people, Louise decided to serve them her palm.

She served that on both cheeks, and at times, even on the nose.

Unable to act with courtesy at all, just like that, Louise didn't end up receiving any tips and was told "Stay here and observe what the other girls do" by Scarron and forced to stand in a corner.

Yes, the other girls were skilled. They smiled brightly and didn't get mad no matter what someone said or did. They smoothly conversed and complimented the men... And when the men tried to touch them, they would kindly grab that hand and prevent them from touching. Doing so, the men would try to win the girl's favor and splurged out on tip. *There's no way I could do that.* Louise frowned.

The family I was born to in this world is the Vallière family, who are nobles and mages. And what's more is that they are a duke family! If I go back to my territory, I'm a princess! Louise thought. *Even if you told me the world will end tomorrow, I couldn't act that courtly towards them. What's more, in this embarrassing outfit.....*

Outfit?

Louise realized at that moment. She was in the same camisole outfit as yesterday. Even she thought that interiorly, she's not cute, but she was quite something on the outside. She scanned and found a mirror in the store. Then she made numerous poses in front of the mirror. She tried holding her thumb in her mouth and fidgeting.

Yep. These clothes are embarrassing, but I'm cute. A noble even if I rot. None of the girls here can match the nobility I let off. Right. Surely. Probably.

Maybe Saito is enchanted by my appearance, she thought and became happy. *What, idiot? You're late to realize my charm. Surely he'll be like "aah, Louise is cute, amazing, aah, such a cute girl was beside me... I didn't realize it... Yet I was so engrossed with a maid... Having her wear a sailor outfit and twirling around... I regret it... This stupid dog is regretting it."*

Hmph. Are you an idiot? Sure took you a long time to realize your master's charms. But you're just a familiar, so don't look at your master in that rude way. Go and polish my shoes or something! What? You can't. You can't touch your master. For a dog, where are you touching? But if you promise to serve me for the rest of your life, I'll let you do it for a little bit. But in return, kneel down on the ground. Kneel down on the ground and apologize for all of the times you slighted me. Got it?

Fantasizing that far, Louise covered her mouth to restrain her chuckling. Then looking sideways... she stole a glance at the kitchen thinking that he was entranced by her by now.

There! That stupid dog is washing dishes with that stupid look!

Eh?

Indeed, Saito was intently observing the area that Louise was at while absent-mindedly washing the dishes. But... He was not looking at Louise. Louise followed his glance. What was there was a girl with long black hair that was rolling with laughter with a customer. It was Jessica.

Louise's pink-blond hair started surging.

Again, you and that. That black hair.

Observing Jessica even more, she followed his glance by milli-units. Jessica was wearing a tidy one-piece that opened at her big breasts. Saito's eyesight was homing into the cleavage that poked out of her one-piece.

Her breasts. Do you really love those apple-like things so much?

Why do dogs like breasts like those? Huh?!

"Hou~" Saito let out a sad sigh. Then with a spellbound face, he drew circles

with his two hands as if measuring the circumference of Jessica's breasts. Something snapped inside Louise's mind, so for now, she decided to throw a nearby glass with all her might.

Directly hitting around his temple, Saito fell down in front of the sink.

"What are you doing?!"

The man whose own glass was thrown stood up and tried to grab Louise's shoulder. Louise raised her body by grabbing onto a table and serviced the man's face with the bottom of both of her shoes. It was a special, double-the-content service.

Looking back at Scarron who had went "Louise-chan" and rushed over, Louise firmly gripped her fists while trembling all over.

"That familiar... Just you watch. I'll give you some proper service!"

When Saito woke up... what was there were Jessica's big breasts. Thinking "What's this!", his mouth gaped open.

"Wah, you're finally conscious?"

Looking around, he realized he was lying on a bed.

"Where is this?"

"My room."

Sitting on the chair in a way as to hug the chair's back, Jessica smiled.

"Why?"

"You fainted when a glass flew into your head."

"I see... What was that glass...?"

But it seemed Jessica had no interest in the glass.

"Hey, hey, I got it now."

"What?"

"Louise. She's a noble, right?"

Saito started coughing violently.

"You don't have to play dumb. Papa has entrusted me with the management of the store's girls. My ability to discern girls is quite good. Geez, that Louise didn't even know how to carry dishes. Not only that, but her pride was oddly high. And that demeanor... probably a noble."

Saito embraced his head. *I even had her wear a plain one-piece... It was completely obvious, wasn't it? What "hide your social status"? There was no hiding at all.*

"Hanh! Her a noble? No way! She's so violent, rude, and has no gracefulness at all..."

"It's okay. I won't tell anyone. You have some kind of circumstance, right?"

Seeing Saito remain silent, Jessica smiled. This person really tended to be a mass of curiousity... She wanted to ask him, so she purposely brought him all the way over here.

"It's better if you don't stick your head in on this."

Saito said in a low voice. He wanted to scare her and make her not question him any further. But it didn't work on Jessica.

"Eh-! What's that? Something bad involved? Isn't that interesting?"

Leaning her body even further, she brought her face... breasts nearer. Why is her cleavage so emphasized, is the reason her clothes are bold compared to Siesta's because she's a town girl, and Saito's face started reddening, at which then Jessica put on a meaningful smile.

"Hey."

"What is it?"

"You've never gone out with a girl before, have you?"

"Wh-What? That's, you can't underestimate me or..."

It was a bulls-eye. She's pretty sharp about things... Then cold sweat started flowing.

"I understand it. I'm quite a sharp town girl, after all. It's really easy to figure out what's going on in country peoples' heads."

Being called a country person, Saito snapped a little. *You know, in Tokyo, regardless about this Tristania, it isn't just some puny structure. You'd cry if you saw Tokyo Tower.* Thinking that, he said back

"Who's a country person? I don't want to be told by some gay's daughter."

"That's mean. Even if he's like that, he's a kind papa. When my mother died, he said 'Well then, papa will also work in mama's place too...' "

"That très bien?"

Jessica nodded.

"Well, we can put stuff about papa aside. Hey, what are you planning with that noble girl? You're not a noble, right? Her attendant?"

"I'm not her attendant."

Because Saito said rather sullenly, Jessica laughed complacently and grabbed Saito's hands.

"Wh-what?"

"Do you want me to teach you about girls?"

"What?"

Stiffening instantly, Saito looked at Jessica restlessly. This bar girl who knew quite well how to use her charms didn't miss Saito's instantaneous change.

"But, in return, tell me properly, okay? About just what you two are planning..."

Jessica took the hand of Saito's she had grabbed and brought it over to her cleavage. Saito was stupefied. Getting along with a girl from a bar. Isn't this an excellent way to gather information too? All kinds of customers visit bars. Rumors also gather here. People that are planning something might let their guard down to the girls and tell their secrets.

Making Jessica an ally here would probably be a plus to activities from now on.

Thinking that way, the moment when the feeling of warm skin got to his finger...

The door of Jessica's room was sent flying.

Saito sprung up. Louise, trembling while wearing her pure white camisole, stood there.

"What are you doing?"

Saito looked at his hand and drew it back in panic.

"In-information gathering."

"Who's and what place's information are you gathering?"

While he panicked, Louise walked briskly into the room and kicked Saito's nether region from the front. Saito tumbled. Grabbed by the ankle, when he was about to be dragged off...

Jessica called and stopped Louise.

"Wait a moment, Louise."

"What?"

"What happened to serving customers? Aren't you in the middle of work?"

Being called in such a casual way by a simple town girl, Louise started shaking, but it couldn't be helped right now.

"Just shut up! After I discipline th-this... stupid brother, I'll be right back!"

Saito had become Louise's brother here.

"Do you have that much free time? Even though you can't even get a single tip very well..."

"Th-that's not related."

"It does by a lot. That's because I was left with the management of the girls. Girls like you are a bother. You anger the regular customers, don't receive orders, throw glasses around, and pick fights."

Louise started to look displeased.

"Well, I guess it can't be helped. Brats like you can't work as a bar's fairy." Jessica said boringly.

"I'm not a brat. I'm sixteen."

"Eh? You were the same age as me?"

Jessica looked genuinely surprised at Louise.

Then she looked at Louise's breasts and then her own. Then she covered her mouth after making a quick laughing sound.

"Good luck then. Though I won't be expecting anything. But if you mess up any further, you're fired, got it?"

Louise snapped at Jessica's behavior.

"Wha-what... Stupid woman and their big breasts... Calling people a brat, or a child, or a weakling..."

Saito, still on the floor, inserted

"No, no one said weakling..."

Louise trampled that face flat. Saito moaned and fell quiet.

"I'll collect enough tips to build a castle."

"Eh~, really? I'm so happy!"

"Because when I try my best, I'm amazing. Those men will all turn around towards me."

"You said it, huh?"

"I said it. Who would lose to someone like you?"

Louise said while staring hatefully at Jessica's breasts. *The stupid dog looked at those*. The stupid dog thrust his hand there!

"Perfect timing. There's a tip race next week."

"Tip race?"

"That's right. It's a competition where the store's girls compete to see how many tips they can get. There's also a prize prepared for the winner."

"Doesn't that sound interesting?"

"Try your best. If you beat me in the tip race, I won't ever call you a brat again."

Chapter 3

"Faeries! Finally, the awaited week has come!"

"Yes, Mi Mademoiselle!"

"Let's start the tip race with enthusiasm!"

Applause and cheering resounded through the store.

"Now then, as everyone knows... The establishment of this 'Charming Faeries' Inn dates back four-hundred years, during the reign of His Majesty, Henry III, also called Tristain Attraction King. His Majesty Henry III, known to be a peerlessly handsome man, was said to be the reincarnation of a fairy."

Scarron began to speak in an absorbed manner.

"One day, that king visited the city in secret. And then, amazingly, he set his foot in this unopened bar. At that time, the store's name was 'Eel's Bed' Inn, which didn't have a bit of appeal or anything at all. There, the king, how about it! Fell in love with a waitress girl he met there!"

Then Scarron shook his head sadly.

"But... a king should not fall in love with a girl from a bar... In the end, the king gave up on this love. Then... the king prepared a bustier and sent it to the girl as a memento of their love. My ancestors were greatly impressed by that love and changed the store's name, basing it on the bustier. What a beautiful story..."

"What a beautiful story! Mi mademoiselle!"

"That is this 'Charming Faeries' Bustier'!"

Emphatically, Scarron stripped off his outer garments and trousers. This time, Saito, who had been watching distantly, went "Ouue" and vomited. That was

because Scarron was wearing a short and sexy, black bustier that fit his body perfectly.

"This 'Charming Faeries' Bustier' that the king sent to the girl he loved four-hundred years ago is my family's heirloom! This bustier has a magic that allows it to change its size depending on its wearer's constitution as well as the magic "Attraction" cast on it."

"It's wonderful! Mi mademoiselle!"

"Nnnn~! Très bien!"

Scarron posed with an ecstatic voice.

At that time... Surprisingly, the feeling "It's not too bad" rose up inside Saito. Good will towards Scarron... that type of feeling. Even though his appearance was that disgusting, wasn't it okay in its own way? Saito started feeling.

Saito then realized it. This was the identity of the "Attraction" magic! But Scarron's appearance in it was so much of a minus, the effect could only get to "It fits so-so".

I see. Because the wearer is Scarron, I only thought to that level. If a normal girl wore it... I might see her as a peerless beauty. Magic really is scary, Saito nodded.

Still posing, Scarron continued his speech.

"The fairy that wins the tip race that starts this week will be given the rights to wear this 'Charming Faeries' Bustier' for a da-y! Geez! I wonder how much tips one would get on the day she wears it! I get excited just thinking about it! And that's why everyone should try her best!"

"Yes! Mi mademoiselle!"

"Very good! Well then, everyone! Hold your glass!"

The girls held up their glasses all at once.

"To the tip race's success and business, prosperity and..."

There, Scarron cut off his words and stood up straight with a serious look after clearing his throat. And then, not in his usual feminine language, but in a proper middle-aged man's voice, he said, "a prayer to Her Majesty the Queen's health. Cheers."

And raised his wine cup.

Now then, the tip race started like this, but...

Because she thought that at this rate, she wouldn't get any tips, Louise decided to stop talking. Louise realized that she would anger the customer whenever she opened her mouth. That's why she decided to be as silent as she could. Deciding that, she was pouring wine for a certain customer when he talked to her. Success. It's a chance to get a tip.

"Hey, you, just for a bit. Show me your hand."

Louise put out her hand.

"I practice divination, so I'll divine for you."

The customer looked at Louise's palm and said this

"According to my divination, you... were born as a flour grinder. Am I right?"

How dare you compare the likes of a flour grinder to a noble like me? What a thing.

The man divined further.

"Oh! You're like that right? Got a guy you like?"

She thought of her familiar's face. She couldn't forgive herself for thinking that. *I don't have one.* Louise shook her head.

"No? You do, don't you?! Then I'll divine your compatibility with him... Wah! I'm surprised!"

The man tragically shook his head.

"Worst."

I know that even if you don't tell me. I know it too well. Besides, I don't like him in the first place.

Offended, Louise gave her thanks for the divination with her foot. To Louise, the person closest to her of the opposite sex was Saito. Her habit of treating Saito accidentally came out. Habits are scary.

"Wh-what's with you?! You brat!"

I'm not a brat. I'm sixteen. She wanted to respond, but firmly stayed quiet. *I decided to stay quiet just a moment again, didn't I?*

"Say something! You pipsqueak!"

I'm just slow to grow. What a mean thing to say.

Thinking to properly tell the customer her age, Louise kicked the customer's face up sixteen times. The guest was flattened.

Well, it was this way the whole time, so Louise didn't get any tips that day.

Louise shuddered that as a result of trying to remain silent, the number of times the sole of her foot would fly increased in place of her abusive language. It seemed the feelings she could not express out loud were said by her foot's sole instead.

On the next morning, Louise consulted with Saito on what to do. Saito proposed that to prevent her foot's sole from flying, Louise should take off her panties and do work, and was hit.

The second day.

Louise was careful to not let her foot fly.

To keep herself smiling no matter what someone said, she placed wire in her mouth and fixated her face into a smile. The fully prepared waitress Louise never stopped smiling. But... She didn't receive any tips. She held back and kept

the bottom of her feet from flying, and she fixated her smile. But even then.

Wow, the problem came from her hand.

A customer took interest in the waitering Louise. It seems he liked her face.

"Oh, you're... a bit cute, aren't ya? Pour for me."

The man was satisfied with Louise's face, but soon realized a certain fault. Her chest. What's this. Completely flat. Unintentionally, teasing words came spilling out.

"What's with you? Don't tell me you're a boy? Well, your face is so-so though... Listen, let me teach you a trick. At least round up some cloths and stuff it in there. If you do that, you'll become number one here! Gahaha! Now pour some for me." By that man's words, her face's muscles started twitching, but her smile was safely fixated by the wire. At this rate, it was supposed to go well thanks to the wire.

But it wasn't so.

Louise had poured the wine onto the man's head.

"What are you doin'?!"

The man stood up. Louise, sensing danger to her body, slammed the wine bottle into his head.

The man crumbled to the floor so she did not have to pour for him anymore, but she didn't get any tips.

Like this, Louise was shocked that every time someone made fun of her breasts' size, her hand would move on its own and have the customer's head drink the wine.

On the next morning, Louise consulted with Saito. Saito proposed that to keep herself from letting the customers' head drink the wine, she should place the wine bottle in-between her breasts and pour.

The wine bottle will not physically reach the customer's head if her hands are

positioned at her breasts. Plus, the pose is very enjoyable to the customer.

But Louise, thinking that he was saying something bad about her breasts' size, hit Saito.

The third day.

Louise was careful to keep her hands from moving. After she placed the wine on top of the table, she grouped her hands together behind her and smiled brightly. Even if she was told to pour something, all she did was smile.

"Pour me some."

She smiled brightly.

"I said pour me some."

She smiled brightly.

"I'm telling you to pour me some!"

She smiled brightly.

"What is up with you?!"

There was no way she would get a tip. When she consulted with Saito, he told her to hold it in her mouth while she poured it. Louise's mouth was small. A wine bottle couldn't fit in there. Looking carefully, Saito looked like he was sleepy. Just because you're sleepy doesn't mean you should say random things. And Louise hit Saito.

The fourth day.

The competition was half-way done. The number of tips so far was zero. As expected, Louise had gotten desperate. Louise waitered while taking caution of the sole of her foot, the position that she poured wine in, and her words.

"You seem unskilled, but your manners are oddly refined. You can have this."

Possibly because of her efforts, Louise got a gold coin for a tip from what seemed to be the first noble customer she had served.

"Re-really? Can I have this?"

"Aah. Take it."

"Waai!"

Jumping up from happiness, she turned over a plate and spilt the food onto the customer's shirt.

"I-I'm sorry..."

Louise apologized, but the noble customer did not forgive her.

"You... This shirt was a gem made from silk that your wages could never pay for. What are you going to do about it?"

"I'm really sorry... Auu..."

"Well then, just what will you do about this?"

"I-I'll pay for it..."

"Hmph, then let's do this. I'll have you compensate for this with something you can do."

"What should I do?"

"Not much, just come to my room in the middle of the night."

"And then?"

"You understand what happens after that, right? You're not a child, right? A child."

"Wh-what does that mean?"

"I mean that you'll compensate quite a lot with your body. That's what I mean. Muhoho!"

Blood flew to Louise's head.

E, e-e, even though you're a noble, what a thing to do! The third daughter of a duke family became enraged. *Don't even place the nobles near that lewdness. As Her Majesty's representative, I have to conclude and punish this disgrace of a noble.*

"You disgrace! It's because people like you exist! The kingdom's authority! Authority! And my authority as well!"

"Wh-what are you doing? Uwah! Stop! Stop, I say!"

Her foot, words, and the wine flew out all at once.

"I'm returning this to you!"

She slapped the tip she finally got on his face.

Louise was called out by Scarron and was told to wash dishes all day tomorrow as punishment. Louise was very irritated and decided to hit Saito.

The fifth day... While Louise was washing dishes with Saito, Jessica came up to them.

"How are you doing? Ojou-sama, I've collected one-hundred and twenty écus so far."

"Isn't that amazing?"

Louise replied sullenly.

"You won't get any tips while washing dishes."

"I know that."

Louise said while washing the dishes amateurishly.

"Sheesh. You can't even wash a dish properly?"

Jessica complained while looking at the dish Louise had washed.

"...I am properly washing the dishes, you know."

"See, there is still oil remaining. You don't call this washed."

Jessica took the plate from Louise and cleaned it up with quick hand movements. Louise watched her in an offended way.

"Hey."

Jessica glared at Louise.

"What?"

"Someone's teaching you. What's with that attitude?"

"......Uu..."

Saito watched over the two's exchange with a surprised look.

"When someone's teaching you something, it's 'thank you' right? It's the basics, the basics."

"...Th-thank you."

"Geez, it's because you make that face that you don't get any tips. Tomorrow's the last day, got it? Get it together, Ojou-sama."

Leaving that said, Jessica disappeared back to the bar. Louise hung her head dejectedly.

As the day headed toward morning...

Louise, after washing dishes through the night, looked at her own hands and sighed. Louise's fingers that had never washed anything before had become bright red due to unaccustomed kitchen work and were hurting thanks to the cold water and soap.

Why do I have to do something like this? She thought. Even though she herself was a noble, she had to wash dishes... Having to serve all of those commoners...

Plus, a bar girl talked so impertinently to me.....

"No more." Louise muttered. *Whether it's information gathering or whatever, this isn't my job. I'm a legend. I'm the user of Void, you know. Yet why do I have to be a waitress at a bar? Shouldn't, like, a more showy mission be waiting for me?*

Thinking like that, tears felt like pouring out from the sadness. Opening a board of the floor, Saito poked his head out from downstairs so Louise crawled into the bed. She didn't want him to see her crying.

"Here, some food."

Saito called out to Louise, placing a plate filled with stew on the table. But Louise just answered tiredly from inside the bed.

"I don't need it."

"There's no way you don't need it. You won't hold up if you don't eat."

"It's not tasty."

"Even if you say it's not tasty, there is nothing else to eat so there's no helping it."

Even then, Louise wrapped herself in the blanket and didn't come out of the bed. Saito approached the bed and pulled off the blanket. Louise was crouching inside the futon in her pajamas.

"Eat. Your body will break down."

"My hands hurt. I can't hold up a spoon."

Louise whined like a child. Seeing that it was no use, Saito scooped up the stew with the spoon and carried it to Louise's mouth.

"Then, here, I'll feed you. Eat. Okay?"

Louise finally took a sip. Tears poured out from her eyes.

"I don't want this anymore. I'm going back to the academy."

"What about the mission?"

"Don't care. This isn't my mission."

Saito withdrew the spoon and looked at Louise.

"You know."

"What."

"Do you have any motivation at all?"

"I do."

"Princess-sama entrusted you with this job because she trusted you, right? Blend in with commoners and gather information. Because if she used someone from the royal court, she'd be denied... She couldn't depend on anyone so she depended on you, right?"

"That's right."

"Yet what's with you. You lost all of our money in the gambling area because you got pissed off, and you drag along your noble's pride here and can't get a single tip. You also anger the customers. Not even close to information gathering."

"Just shut up. But what does that mission have to do with stupid dish washing and serving? I want to do bigger jobs. No more of this. Why does a noble like me..."

Saito grabbed Louise's shoulders and turned her to face him.

"What?!"

"Guess what, Ojou-sama? Everyone's working. They're trying their best at this job you call stupid and eating this meal. Only you nobles play around and have people feed you."

Saito said in a serious voice. Louise, fearing the cold anger in his eyes, looked downwards without thinking.

"I can't say too many cocky things because I was raised similar to you, but after coming here, I've suffered in many ways and understand. That it is pretty troublesome just to live."

Somehow not being able to say anything back, Louise remained silent. Saito continued his words.

"I don't understand too well, but perhaps people that concern themselves about their stupid pride so much can't do big jobs? I think so anyways. Well, if you tell me to quit, I'll quit. I don't really care either way. Because it's not my job after all." Louise closed her mouth quietly.

"You don't want it anymore?"

Saito asked, sticking out the spoon. Louise jumped out of bed, took the spoon from Saito, and started devouring the stew.

Saito spread out his hands, turned his head, and took out something. It was a small ceramics case.

"....What is that?"

"Cream that works on water-chapped skin. Jessica gave it to me."

Then Saito told Louise to extend her hand. Louise did so obediently.

Louise looked guiltily at Saito's face while he smeared the cream, but... soon muttered in a small voice.

"Hey..."

"What?"

"I'll serve. I'll wash the dishes. Is this fine?"

"Yeah, that's fine." Saito said in a relieved voice.

"But, are you okay?"

"What is?"

"Is this okay?"

Louise blushed and said in a displeased voice.

"Serving is fine. I'll even say a word of courtesy. But..."

"But what?"

"I-is it fine if customers touch your master all over?"

Saito firmly fell silent.

"Hey. What about it? Don't say such selfish things and properly answer if it is okay or bad."

Saito began to eat the stew quietly.

"I said hey. Which one is it? Say it."

Louise asked while pulling on Saito's ear. Looking heavily at the stew, Saito murmured

"...I-if you allowed that kind of touching, I'd slap 'em."

"Who would you slap?"

"...You."

Louise looked sharply into Saito's eyes.

"Why? The master is going to be slapped by the familiar, so explain the reason."

Silence fell.

Looking to the side, Saito said dully

"I-I'll forgive holding hands though."

"What's with that?"

Louise sent Saito flying.

"What's with 'I'll forgive hands'?! I'm asking you for the reason for slapping me! Idiot!"

"Be-because....."

"Besides, what do you mean by 'forgive'? Acting so proudly. Whether I hold hands or do whatever isn't decided by you. It's me, me! Hmph!"

Louise combed up her pink-blond hair and put on a composed expression. She grouped her arms together.

"Fine. Was it that 'Charming Faeries' Bustier'? I'll wear that and charm all of the customers. Yeah, for the sake of tips. I'll forgive. Not just my hand..."

Saito jumped up and shouted at Louise.

"Don't joke around!"

Louise turned her head around and crawled back into the bed. Right then, Saito managed to get himself back under control and shook his head.

"Well, the 'Charming Faeries' Bustier' is impossible. It's the victory prize. Right now, you're probably the last place on tips."

Louise did not reply.

Becoming worried, Saito asked.

"...Would you really forgive them? Putting the tip race victory aside, are you that determined? Isn't that a bit extreme? Come on."

Louise did not answer back.

"Hey, are you really going to?"

In an almost crying voice, Saito persistently asked Louise. But, "Shut up! I'm going to sleep!" Louise shouted... and Saito down-heartedly crawled into bed.

Chapter 4

The final day of the tip race had come. On the evening of that day, Scarron announced the progress so far.

"Now I will now announce the current top three! First is third place! Marlene-chan! Eighty-four écus, fifty-two sous, and six deniers!"

Applause resounded. The blond girl called Marlene gave an elegant bow.

"Second place! Jeanne-chan! Ninety-eight écus, sixty-five sous, and three deniers!"

Applause once again. The chestnut-haired girl called Jeanne smiled and nodded.

"And then... First place!"

Scarron slowly scanned over the girls and nodded repeatedly.

"Without match, my daughter! Jessica! One-hundred-sixty écus, seventy sous, and eight deniers!"

"Wahhhhhh!" As cheers of joy rang out. Jessica, wearing a suggestive dress with a profound slit that was prepared for this day, bowed.

"Now! Whether you cry or laugh, today is the last day! But today is the day of daeg in the week of teuz! Because it is the end of the month, lots of customers will come! If you try hard, you might get lots of tips. The top places are still in range!"

"Yes! Mi mademoiselle"

Saito poked the serious-looking Louise. Louise had the type of face that said she had resolved to something.

"How much do you have?"

Without answering, Louise opened her tightly gripped fist. What was there... were several glittering copper coins.

Saito stroked his chest down. With that, victory was impossible even if Louise tried her very best.

Louise's words "If I obtain the Charming Faeries' Bustier, I'd charm the customers and forgive everything" were still bothering him even now.

What is "forgive everything"?! What do you mean?! Even though, I... I haven't even done anything! Though it's not like I have the right to do so. Not at all though.

After all, I'm just a familiar.....

'I want her to try her best, but not to that level' was the type of convenient emotion that ran through Saito.

Scarron shouted in a loud voice.

"Then let's do this with enthusiasm!"

Cheering filled with all kinds of feelings resounded through the store.

Now then... Louise was a bit different this day. She took out the wire that fixed her smile and revealed a natural smile.

She would smile brightly and then fidget embarrassedly. Doing so, the customer would ask.

"Is there something wrong?"

Louise would nibble her thumb and continue fidgeting. And then as if saying something really difficult to say,

"Well, Mr. customer, because you're so wonderful..." She would try hard and mutter.

But the customer himself seemed to be used to that level of flattery. Without moving, he held out his wine cup. Here, Louise would unleash her finishing move.

Pinching the hem of her camisole, she bowed gracefully. As expected of a duke family, she did it perfectly. The bow, which was done as if in front of a king, was filled with the spirit of a noble. None of the girls there could imitate such a manner.

Doing so, the customer would become interested in Louise's background. I see. When I get a better look, her features are quite similar to a noble's.

"You were born in the upper class, right?"

Even then, Louise would not cease showing embarrassment. Then sorrowfully and with melancholy, she looked outside. The man became more and more enchanted at Louise's refined behavior. Bending himself forward, he spoke his expectations.

"Did you serve at some noble's house? They taught you good etiquette there, right?" Louise continued to smile brightly. The delusions inside the customer started to become as overexaggerated as he pleased.

"If a cute and quiet girl like you served them, it probably didn't end there. Not just etiquette, but those type of things and these type of things... were forcibly trained into you, perhaps?"

Louise gave a graceful bow. Louise's only weapons were that smile and the bow.

"Kuh! What a cruel story! A cute girl like you... But how did a servant like you come to work at this store... I see! I got it! You got tired of that forcible master who was trying to get you to do those type of things and these type of things and ran out of the mansion, right? But the debt left behind by your parents still remains. To return the money, you're desperately working. Something like that, right?!"

Louise smiled while looking at the customer. Being gazed at like that by Louise's jewel-like reddish-brown eyes, the customer, as if enchanted by some spell, wanted to loosen the string on his wallet.

"What a poor child. Hmm, then use this to help repay your debt. By the way, well, those type of things and these type of things... are what kind of things? Please tell me. Okay?"

The customer, who believed in his own delusions because of Louise's demeanor, would give Louise silver and gold coins. The moment she got it, she ran at full speed back into the kitchen, squatted, and let out a rough breath. Her forcing herself to be courteous and her act that caught people's sympathy felt like leprosy, so Louise decided to hit Saito, who was washing dishes, for now. Doing so, she felt a bit refreshed. Then she rushed back to the table.

Afterwards, it was time for her "job". It was the information gathering entrusted to her by Princess-sama. She didn't want to lose at the tip race, but this job was more important.

Sitting beside the customer, she asked

"Geez, they say it's a war. You'd get tired of this..."

"Pretty much so. They behold her as a "holy woman", but how about the government!"

"What does that mean?"

"I'm saying that that ignorant princess can't govern this country!"

He was insulting Henrietta, but she firmly endured it. She had to hear all kinds of stories from him.

"Like that battle in Tarbes... it was like we won by chance! I'm not so sure about next time!"

"Is that so..."

Just like that, Louise slowly collected the rumors in the town. The drunkards liked to discuss about the situations in the world. When Louise brought up the subject to interest them, they would start criticizing the government as if they were waiting for her to ask. The drunkards would talk about the government as if they had become a cabinet minister.

"Besides, it’d be better for the country if Albion governed us, right?"

If such an outrageous opinion was said,

"I'm saying we should hurry up and attack Albion!" such a brave opinion would jump out.

Someone,

"There's a rumor that the army will be strengthened! The taxes will increase again! They've got to be kidding us!"

said this and,

"Can the current armaments protect the country? I wish they'd hurry and organize the armada!" a completely opposite opinion comes up.

Anyways... putting it together, the popularity Henrietta received for defeating Albion at the battle of Terbes seemed to have started to darken.

'The war remains unfinished... Looks like the depression will continue. Henrietta is young. Can she guide this country well from now on?' Was the anxiety everyone was feeling.

It's probably a painful story to Henrietta, but I have to properly report to her... Louise thought.

Like that, Louise started collecting tips and information but...

Jessica's tip collecting was simply unmatchable.

Anyway, Jessica was good at making customers think "She has fallen for me."

Louise started to observe how Jessica did things. If you do not know the enemy, you cannot win the fight.

Jessica would first act cold to the customer she chose.

She placed the food in front of the customer while looking angry. The customer was surprised at that attitude.

"Hey, what's this, Jessica? Aren't you in a bad mood?"

Jessica glared at the customer with cold eyes.

"Who were you talking to earlier?"

Whether you call it a skill or otherwise, that jealousy was godly. After all, it really looked like she was jealous. At that moment, the customer misunderstood and thought that she was in love with him and currently very jealous.

"Wh-what... Cheer up."

"It's nothing... You like that girl, right?"

"Stupid! The one I love the most is you! Come on..."

He said and tried to hand over a tip. But Jessica brushed away that money.

"It's not money! What I want are kind words! What you said before... was that a lie? I was really serious! What?! I don't care anymore!"

"There's no way that was a lie."

The man became desperate and tried to soothe Jessica.

"Please cheer up... You're the only one for me. Okay?"

"You say that to everyone. Just because you're a bit popular with girls..."

No matter how you looked, the man did not have a popular face. Usually, he would not believe such flattery. But condemning words were coming out of Jessica's mouth. In a way that seemed as if she did so unintentionally. The man was completely tricked.

"I'm not popular! Really!"

"You're right. The only one who would think to kiss your lips is me."

"That's right. Very much so!"

"Hau... But I'm tired."

"What's wrong?"

"You know, right now, we're doing this stupid race called a tip race. I don't really care about tips but... I'd get scolded if I only get a small amount."

"If it's tips, I'll give you some."

"It's okay! You give me kind words, so it's okay! In exchange, I'll get mad at you if you say the same thing to other girls, got it?"

Then she looked upwards at him. With this, the man was completely defeated.

"Hah... But it is really tiring to give flattery for the sake of tips... Because honestly revealing your feelings to the person you love and flattery are different..."

"I understand. I'll give you this, so don't go sucking up to other people. Okay?"

"I said it's fine! I don't need it!"

"It's my feelings. My feelings."

The man made the refusing Jessica take the tip. "Thank you" Jessica whispered embarrassedly and grasped the man's hand. The man then tried to get that Jessica into going on a date with him.

"Then, today, when the store's closed..."

"Ah! This isn't good! The food will burn!"

After she got what she wanted, there was no need for him anymore. Jessica stood up.

"Ah, hey..."

"Let's talk again later sometime! Don't look at other girls amorously!"

Turning her back on the man, Jessica stuck out her tongue. Everything was just acting.

After Jessica left, the customer turned to his friends and went, "Iyah, getting

jealous like that..."

Louise was completely impressed. The truly fearsome techniques of a town girl that made Kirche look like a child.

Her coaxing ability, that would make people wonder how many ways she had for showing jealousy, allowed her to collect tips as if she swept them up with a broom.

Jessica wasn't really outstandingly beautiful. But... she was at the border of the line that made men think "At this level, maybe even I can do something." These type of girls tend to be more popular in the world compared to the people that were peerlessly beautiful.

Louise, who had been observing, met eyes with Jessica. Jessica grinned and showed Louise her placing the tip in between her cleavage.

Probably, even if she didn't gamble, Saito would have become penniless, Louise thought. If that town girl knew he had money, no one would know just what she would do. And that stupid familiar... would be rolled up and sun-dried in no time.

She thought of Siesta's face.

She thought of Jessica's face.

She thought of Saito's face as he looked at the two's cleavages.

Like I'll lose. Louise firmly squeezed her fist... puffed up her flat chest, and triumphantly rose up on her feet.

While the girls were competing for the number of tips like that...

The feather door opened, and a new group of customers appeared. At the head was a middle-aged man who was wearing a mantle that meant he was a noble. He seemed to be growing fat, and thinning hair was stuck on his smooth forehead. The ones with him seemed to be lower class nobles. They had rapier-like wands hung on their hips, and there were some nobles wearing military uniforms mixed in.

When the noble entered, everything in the store fell silent. Scarron quickly rushed over to the new guest while rubbing his hands together.

"If it isn't Chulenne-sama. Welcome to the 'Charming Faeries' Inn."

The noble called Chulenne twisted his catfish-like mustache and bent it backwards.

"Hmm. Cough. The store seems to be flourishing, huh, shop manager?"

"No, no. Not at all. It's just a coincidence today. Usually, the only thing that happens is the cuckoo sounding. I was soon going to consult with my daughter about visiting the temple tomorrow to get permission to save my neck. Yes."

"What, it isn't a job today. You don't have to make such excuses."

Sorrily, Scarron continued his words.

"It's just my words, Chulenne-sama, but as you can see, the store is fully occupied today..."

"I do not see such a thing though?"

When Chulenne exaggerated like that, the nobles that followed him pulled out their wands. The customers, afraid of the nobles' shining wands, woke from their drunkenness, stood up, and disappeared out of the entrance at full speed. The store became empty at once.

"It seems that speaking of a cuckoo was true after all."

His belly quivering, Chulenne's party reached the seat in the middle.

When Saito realized it, Jessica was beside him, looking frustratingly at Chulenne.

"Who is that guy?"

When Saito asked that, Jessica explained angrily.

"Chulenne, the tax collector around here. Just like that, he comes to the stores under his jurisdiction and swarms around us. A horrible person! He won't even

pay a single copper coin."

"Is that how it is..."

"Swaggering like that just because he's a noble. If you displease him, he'll place an outrageous tax on you and bankrupt your store, so everyone is listening to what he says."

It seemed that in any world, there are people who abuse their power and extort off the common people. No one came to serve him, so Chulenne became irritated. In time, he started complaining.

"Oh! This store seems to be making quite the profit! Isn't this wine a well-cured sake from Gronyu? The clothes that girl is wearing are tailored by Gallia! I guess I have to look over this year's tax rates."

The surrounding nobles went "That's right!" or nodded in agreement to Chulenne.

"Is there not a girl who will pour alcohol for Her Majesty the Queen's tax collector?! This store at least sells that, right?!"

Chulenne shouted. But, none of the store's girls approached him.

"Who would pour for you, when you won't hand over a single tip no matter how much you touch us?"

When Jessica muttered that detestably.....

A small shadow wearing a white camisole approached him while carrying a tray with wine placed on it.

It was Louise.

She had many faults... one of them was "not being able to read the mood". Her head was so full of "working hard as a waitress" that she didn't bother to understand the atmosphere around the customers and the store.

"What? Who are you?"

Chulenne looked suspiciously at Louise. Smiling, Louise left the wine in front of Chulenne.

"Th-that idiot..." Saito murmured in shock while looking at her worriedly

"Mister... you're so dreamy."

Acting as if following a manual, Louise, unable to read the mood, complimented him. But, it seemed Chulenne didn't find Louise to his tastes.

"What's this?! The store is using children?!"

Without moving, Louise held her camisole and bowed. That was all she could do.

"Now, go away, go away. I have no need for children. Off with you."

Saito saw Louise's temple twitch. It seemed she was angry. Saito prayed. *Louise, don't snap! That guy's too dangerous!*

"Oh, looking closer, you're not a kid... just a girl with small breasts."

Louise's face went pale. Her legs started to tremble slowly. Chulenne's face twisted with lust.

And then... extended his hands out towards Louise's small breasts.

"Now, how about this Chulenne-sama checks and see just how big they are."

At that moment...

The sole of a foot exploded onto Chulenne's face.

Toppling the chair, Chulenne rolled backwards.

"Wha, why you!"

The surrounding nobles pulled out their wands all at once.

In the front... was the silhouette of a boy who's shoulders were shaking with anger.

"Saito..."

Louise looked at the back of Saito, who had stood up to protect her. While looking at that back.... something hot filled her chest that had been shaking with anger.

As expected, Saito couldn't endure it anymore. *Louise is trying her best, isn't she? My master doesn't have breasts, but she's cute, right? That Louise tried hard to compliment you, and what do you do? Just complain!*

Well, complaining is fine. I say some at times too. It's Louise, so there's no helping that.

But... But...

There is one thing I can't forgive.

"Hey, old man, cut it out already."

"Da-damn you... To a noble's face, you..."

"Whether they're a noble, a prince, or a god... I definitely won't allow them to do it. It's my own special privilege. Who cares about nobles?! The only one that can touch Louise is me!"

Saito shouted.

Without thinking, Louise blushed. *Even though you're just a familiar, what kind of conceited things are you saying?! You don't have that right either!* She tried to say, but... for some reason, those words did not come out. Her brain was growing blank, as if being boiled. Even with the situation around her like it was, Louise ended up spacing out.

"Seize those people! I'll have them hanged!"

Chulenne's subordinates surrounded Saito.

Saito slowly looked around him.

"Who's going to catch who? Unfortunately for you, I..."

"Unfortunately, what?"

"Fortunately or unfortunately, I received this thing called a legendary power..."

Muttering that, he turned his hand to his back. And... realized that Derflinger, who was supposed to be there, wasn't there.

"Eh?"

Troubled, Saito scratched his head.

"That's right... I left the legend in the attic... After all, it would be only a bother while washing dishes."

"Seize him and that washboard girl!"

The nobles brandished their wands.

"Ti-time out!"

But there was no time out. The enraged nobles chanted their spells. A small rope appeared like a tornado, and the moment it tried to wrap around Saito...

A pure white light flashed through the store and blew the armed nobles all the way to the entrance.

After the light slowly disappeared... Louise appeared, having raised herself to full height on top of a table. The attack was Louise's "Void" spell, 'Explosion'.

Her whole body shaking with anger, her favorite, inherited wand was glittering in her hand. Louise had tied it to her thigh and hidden it, just in case something happened.

Confused, the nobles fell into panic.

Louise muttered in a small voice.

"...Washboard wasn't necessary, was it?"

Her rarely attained happy mood was blown away with that single statement. She recalled a lot of her dark past with that single word "washboard". She thought of

Jessica's and Siesta's cleavages in her mind.

It's too much. For you to say something like that when someone finally goes to serve you.

"Hii! Hiiiiiiii!"

The intensity of the legend... "Void's" intensity frightened the nobles.

"Why do you have to go so far and say those things? Isn't it too much for you to call me a washboard when I came to pour you some alcohol? You better prepare yourself!"

The nobles scrambled to escape.

Without moving, Louise waved her wand.

The ground in front of the entrance was annihilated, creating a large hole. The nobles all dropped into it nicely.

Those nobles piled onto each other and looked up. Louise slowly appeared, and the nobles started trembling even more.

"Wh-what are you? Who are you? From which renowned mage?!"

Chulenne, while trembling, asked Louise. He had never seen or heard of that light that blew people away.

Without answering, Louise took out the permit she got from Henrietta and thrust it in Chulenne's face.

"...H-H-Her Majesty's permit?"

"I am Her Majesty the Queen's court lady, and the third daughter of an esteemed family lineage that boasts of a righteous history. I have no name to tell some petty official like you."

"I-I-I'm very sorry!"

Chulenne bent his fattened body and forcibly bowed in the hole. The nobles that got pushed by him let out moans.

Louise stood up.

"Spare me! At least my life!"

Saying that, Chulenne rummaged through his body and threw his entire wallet to Louise. He urged the nobles around him, and had them do the same and present their wallets to Louise.

"With these! Ignore what has happened! I beg of you!"

Without even looking at the wallets, Louise declared.

"Forget everything you've seen and heard today. Otherwise, no matter how many lives you have, it won't be enough."

"Yes! I swear! I swear to Her Majesty and the Founder that I will not reveal what has happened today to anyone!"

While yelling that, he got out of the hole in a tumbling manner, and Chulenne and his men disappeared into the darkness of the night.

Louise gallantly returned back inside the store. Earsplitting applause assaulted Louise.

"That was amazing! Louise-chan!"

"Couldn't get enough of that look on Chulenne's face!"

"I feel refreshed! That was great!"

Scarron, Jessica, and the store's girls surrounded Louise all at once.

There, Louise returned to her senses, though "Now I've done it...", and hung her head in shame. She had lost it when she was called a washboard. Saito was about to get caught, so she chanted the spell without thinking.

Saito approached her and whispered to her

"...Idiot! You shouldn't use magic, right?!"

"Uu... But..."

"Sheesh... Hah, good grief..... Now we have to start back from zero..."

Scarron patted Louise's and Saito's shoulders.

"It's fine."

"Heh?"

"I knew Louise-chan was a noble beforehand."

Saito glared at Jessica. Panicking, Jessica waved her hands in front of her face to tell him "I didn't say anything."

"Ho-how?"

Louise asked while dumbfounded.

"Because, well, that is..."

The store's girls took over for Scarron.

"It was completely obvious from your attitude and behavior!"

Uu, so that's it... Louise thought, feeling disheartened.

"Just how many years do you think we've been running this bar? My eye for discerning people is top class. But you have circumstances right? Relax. There isn't a girl here that would expose a co-worker's past's secrets."

The girls all nodded at once.

I see. Saito thought. *Jessica wasn't the only sharp one here.*

"The girls here all are pretty accepting. That's why you can relax... Continue earning tips from now on, okay?"

Louise nodded. Saito felt relieved.

Clapping his hands together, Scarron said in a cheerful voice

"Now! All of the customers have gone home now, so I will announce the results

of the tip race."

Cheering voices erupted.

"Well, there is no need to count, right?"

Scarron said after looking at the wallets Chulenne and his men left on the ground.

Looking at the wallets, Louise realized what he meant. Inside... a large amount of money was stuffed there.

"Eh? This is..."

"Tip, right?"

Scarron said and winked an eye. Then he seized her hand and raised it up.

"Winner! Louise-chan!"

Applause resounded through the store.

The evening of the next day... Louise did not come out of her bed.

"Hey, let's go to work."

"I'm resting today."

"Heh?"

Saito looked blankly at her. Then he rethought. *Well, it's been a while since she used magic, so she's probably tired. I guess it's fine if she rests today.*

"Got it. Tell me when you are feeling bad."

The winning prize, "Charming Faeries' Bustier", was hung on the wall. Even though it was a prize... she could only wear it today. Well, it was an heirloom after all.

Descending the stairs, Scarron came up to him.

"Oh? What happened to Louise-chan?"

"It seems she plans to rest for the day."

"My... No way, what a waste..."

"Why is that?"

"Because, she can only wear the 'Charming Faeries' Bustier' today. I'm going to have her return it tomorrow."

"Guess that's true."

"If you wear that, you can get as many tips as you want... What a waste, what a waste."

Murmuring that, Scarron disappeared into the store, which was starting to get tumultuous.

Saito went to his dish-washing, unable to make sense of what was going on.

After working hard and finishing his job, Saito returned to the attic. Looking up from the corridor... light was leaking through the room's floorboards. It seemed that Louise was still awake.

What's with her... Even though she said she was tired and was going to rest, she isn't sleeping at all. She should have just wore the bustier and earned some money in this case.

Pushing the attic's floorboard up, Saito poked his head up. Instantly, astonishment.

The room had been swept clean, and it seemed a dust cloth had been used since not a bit of dust fluttered about. The piled up junk had been placed in one spot, and the room had been adjusted so it actually looked like someone could possibly live there.

“What… happened?”

“I did it. It’s disgusting to live in a dirty place all of the time.”

Facing her voice, Saito became even more astonished.

Food and wine had been lined up on top of the table... and a candle was illuminating it.

And that light... was also shining on Saito's beautifully dressed master.

Saito swallowed his saliva. The fatigue from the day's manual labor started to fly away.

Louise was sitting on a chair beside the table. Crossing her legs, her hair had been done with a barrette just like some time before. And... Her divine appearance also included the "Charming Faeries' Bustier". The black bustier made Louise's beauty even more prominent.

Gaping, Saito just stared at her.

"How long do you intend to put on that stupid expression? Come on, let us eat." Louise said in an awkward tone. A feast had been lined up on the table.

"What is this?!"

"I made those."

Saito stared at Louise, who seemed to be embarrassed.

"Seriously?"

"I had Jessica teach me."

Looking at Louise, who blushed and said that, Saito's heart throbbing intensified. The line of the center of her upper body became a mesh, allowing her white skin to peak through. The black bustier fitted her perfectly, making her body's lines more pronounced. The considerably short-lengthed pannier was overturned around her waist at an apologetic level. It looked more erotic than her naked.

Saito unintentionally averted his eyes. He felt like he'd go crazy if he stared at her. Whether he felt he'd go crazy because he had already been in love with her, or if it was because of the "Attraction" magic that was cast on the bustier, Saito did not know, but... there was one certain thing.

It was charming.

But without being able to say that, Saito spoke in an angry voice.

"...Weren't you going to wear that and service the customers to your heart's content?"

"If I let them touch, you would slap me, right?"

Louise replied in a pouting manner.

"Well, let's eat."

Saito nodded, and began to eat the food Louise made. But... blood had rushed to his head and prevented him from figuring out the taste. This was probably bad. But, either way was fine. Louise made it. That was progress.

"How is the taste?"

Louise asked.

"I-isn't it delicious?"

Saito answered in a manner to avoid the main point.

"I cleaned up the room. How is it?"

"Whew, it's quite something."

"But, how about, me?"

Leaning on her elbow, Louise leaned and peered at Saito.

The light of morning plunged in through the skylight. The morning light covered the attic, invigorating it. He had firmly shut his mouth up until now, but Saito finally thought up some words.

"Très bien."

"...At least compliment me with a different word."

Louise sighed. *Is an attraction magic really cast on this? What? Even though I was thinking of having him treat me kindly. His attitude is the same as ever. As if*

he is mad, as if he is troubled, that kind of attitude.

Boring. I thought he would court me like an idiot if I wore this. Then I would treat him as coldly as possible. It's too late to realize how charming your master is! What, you idiot? Don't touch me. But, yeah, when you said "The only one that can touch Louise is me!", I was a bit happy for some reason, so I'll allow a little bit. But, a little. Only a little, got it?

Even though she imagined that, despite her spending the whole day to prepare, Saito only looked elsewhere.

How boring Louise thought sourly.

In the end, Louise never realized it.

Saito had been madly in love with her since a long time ago... so, that "Attraction" magic was already meaningless.

Story 2: The Encounter with the Flame and the Friendship with the Wind

Chapter 1

Well, this was the Tristain Magic Academy. The summer vacation had just started and in the dorm, two nobles were killing time.

They were Kirche the “Ardent” and Tabitha the “Snowstorm”. Kirche was laying lazily on Tabitha’s bed in a very immodest pose. She had undone all her shirt buttons and was fanning her large chest with her hand. Kirche did like the heat but could not stand warmth.

She was not able to control the boiling heat in the sun-baked room.

“Hey Tabitha, would you mind making some wind for me?”

Tabitha waved her staff without looking up from her book.

“Give me a cold one. One that will cool me to the bone, just like your second name.”

As expected, there was some ice mixed in the wind. The snowy wind immediately cooled Kirche’s body.

“Ahh- that feels good.”

Drinking in Tabitha’s cool wind, Kirche finally took off her shirt. She crossed her legs in a manner that would never be seen by any of her dozen of male friends that worshipped her like a goddess.

She gazed at Tabitha who was reading her book the whole time. Tabitha did not shed a single drop of sweat, as she was completely immersed in her book. “Maybe her second name ‘Snowstorm’ cools her body as well as her mind,” Kirche murmured.

“Hey ‘Snowstorm’? You really like to read books don’t you? Just like a Protestant. Could that be the popular Protestant book about the ‘The Practical

Doctrine’?”

“The Practical Doctrine” was a book that the Protestant sect of religion recited by following the interpretation of the book “The Founder’s Prayer Book," that recorded the great deeds and teachings of the Founder, Brimir.

Although every version of “The Founder’s Prayer Book” claimed to be the “original,” their contents were slightly different. Furthermore, there were theories that “The Founder’s Prayer Book” was written hundreds of years after the fall of the Founder Brimir. “The Founder’s Prayer Book” that had been passed down through the Tristain royal family didn’t even have words in it. Therefore, many theologians interpreted it in such a sketchy way so that it would improve the political powers of the Halkeginia’s churches and themselves. The main body practitioners of the “Practical Doctrine” started in the religious center of the country Romania and was built of commoners who wanted to reform the corrupted churches that exploited people. This soon became an international circumstance. It spread out from commoners and farmers, they stripped power and land from the monks and priests, but no one knew for sure if their practices and interpretation were right. The only one that could possibly answer that was the Founder Brimir himself.

Tabitha closed her book and showed Kirche the title. It wasn’t a religious book, but an ancient magical research book.

“Just reading,” said Tabitha.

“I know. In any case there is no way you're a Protestant. Ahh, it’s really hot today. REALLY hot. That’s why I invited you to go to Germania with me. It’s much cooler there.”

Tabitha reopened her book and continued reading. Kirche, who knew the situation of Tabitha’s family, decided to invite her to the Zerbst House, but Tabitha would not agree to come. With no other choice, Kirche decided to keep Tabitha company in the Magic Academy.

She couldn’t stand to leave Tabitha alone.

“We're probably the only ones who would remain in this kind of sauna.”

Kirche thought about having a water bath in the courtyard. Since all the students

and teachers had left and gone back to their homes, there shouldn’t be any danger of peeping Toms.

But then…

A scream was heard from the floor below.

Kirche and Tabitha exchanged a quick glance.

Kirche quickly put on her shirt and jumped out of the room with her wand. Tabitha soon followed behind her.

In a room a floor below, another pair of students were in the middle of a quarrel.

“What were you thinking?!”

“Um, I’m… I thought it was hot, and I was trying to help you!”

The clamor was between Guiche and Montmorency. Why haven't this pair left the dorm for summer vacation?

“I see, so **that** was your purpose! ‘Let's make potions together,' my butt! I shouldn’t have listened to your cajolery about being able to make any Forbidden Potions I want. Just what were you trying to do?”

“That was my objective! I'm not lying!”

“You're having weird thoughts because no one is around, right? Sorry, but I’m not gonna give you one finger until I’m married!”

Guiche shook his head.

“Don’t come any closer!”

“I’ll swear, I’ll give you my word.”

Guiche put his hands on his chest.

“I swear in the presence of the Founder and God that I, Guiche de Gramont, did not unbutton the sleeping Montmorency because of any bad intentions, but I really thought you looked feverish. You were sweating profusely so I was

worried you were going to be steamed to death.”

“Really?”

Montmorency regarded him with a doubtful look.

“Swear to God.”

Guiche answered solemnly.

“…not gonna do anything weird?”

“No, not even gonna think about it.”

After Montmorency thought for a moment, she raised her skirt and flashed her panties. Since Guiche jumped at her in an instant, she screamed out loud.

“Dear God! A liar! He’s a liar!”

“White! White! It was really white!”

“No! Stop! Please stop!”

After they fooled around for a while, the door opened with a bang. Kirche and Tabitha came in and their eyes met Montmorency’s eyes, who was just pushed onto a bed by Guiche.

“…oh, you were just about to do it,” sighed Kirche.

Guiche, who suddenly became serious, stood up and said in a very dignified way, “Oh, I was just… straightening the wrinkles in Montmorency’s shirt.”

“By pushing her onto a bed?” Kirche asked with a scoff.

“Straightening the wrinkles,” Guiche repeated himself.

Montmorency said in a cold tone, “Quit it already. That’s all you have in your head.”

Guiche flushed.

Kirche opened her mouth and said tiredly, “You two are a really cheap couple. You don’t have to do it in this suffocating dorm.”

“We are not doing anything! …and I should ask what you're doing. It’s summer break.”

“It’s just not worth the trouble for us. Although it is a vacation, it’s a pain to cross the border just for that. So what are you two doing anyway?”

“We were, um…”

Montmorency fidgeted, as she could not say that she was making Forbidden Potions.

“Ma-magic research.”

“Well, you were doing *some* kind of research.”

“It was Guiche who wanted to do weird research! His brains are probably fried in this heat!”

Thus criticized Guiche hung his head.

“I guess.”

Kirche muttered, “What do you mean, ‘I guess’?”

“Let’s go out. It wouldn't be a surprise if we fry our brains in here.”

“Huh? Where?”

“Let’s go to the town. It’s gonna be a long break, so let’s have some fun.”

“Well, I *do* want to drink something cold…”

Guiche agreed. Montmorency, who didn’t even want to think about what would happen if she was left alone in the dorm with Guiche, also agreed.

“Really cool your head down when you drink, ok?”

“I will, swear to God.”

“So, what about that little fella?”

Montmorency pointed her finger at Tabitha. Kirche answered.

“She’s going.”

“You can tell by just looking at her?”

“I can.”

Kirche said it as though it was obvious.

Tabitha then closed her book, walked over to the window sill, and blew a whistle with her mouth. A flapping noise was heard. In a blink, Tabitha jumped out of the window. Kirche followed.

As Montmorency peeked outside the window, she saw Tabitha’s floating Wind Dragon. Kirche was riding on its back and was waving.

“Hurry up or we’ll leave you!”

Guiche and Montmorency both jumped after her and Guiche, who went ahead, tried to catch Montmorency.

Then Montmorency started screaming things like ‘don’t touch me’ and ‘don’t look at me’ to tease Guiche.

“But…I was only trying to catch you.”

“Where do you think you’re touching?”

“I thought you two were lovers,” muttered Kirche with surprise.

The group finally arrived at Tristain’s castle town and went to a road that forked from Bulton Avenue. It was just about sunset. In the darkening streets, the magic lamps started to color the surroundings. That magical, wondrous sight created a happy atmosphere that wrapped around the street with the summer heat.

If Bulton Avenue was Tristain’s front face, then this Chicton Street was the bowel. Indecent bars and gambling dens were lined up along the street. Montmorency frowned, but Kirche walked on unworriedly. While walking, the

group discussed which bar to go to. “Do you know any of the bars around here?” Kirche asked Guiche.

Guiche answered with a smile,

“Well, I do know a good one that I've always wanted to go to.”

“It’s not a weird bar, is it?” Montmorency asked as she heard an amorous tone to his speech. Guiche shook his head.

“It’s not weird at all!”

“Then what kind of a bar is it?”

Guiche fell silent.

“See, it **is** a weird bar! Just say it!”

Montmorency started to choke Guiche.

“N-, no it’s not! It’s just girls in cute clothes bringing wine for you… Arg!”

“If that's not weird, then what is?”

“That kind of sounds like fun.”

It seemed to have piqued Kirche’s interest. She suggested to Guiche,

“Let’s go there, just some plain bar would be too boring.”

“WHAT?” Montmorency bellowed.

“Why don't Tristainian women have any confidence in themselves? Makes me sick.”

Because Kirche said that in such a taunting way, Montmorency suddenly stood up and said,

“It’s just that wine will taste bad if we just let some low-class women pour it.”

But because Guiche, who had been backed up by Kirche, started to skip away,

Montmorency had no choice but to follow.

“Hey! Wait for me! Don’t leave me here!”

“Welcome!”

As they went into the shop, a tall man who wore a leather shirt welcomed them to the shop.

“Oh, are you new? More noble ladies! How beautiful! How très bien! The girls in the shop will be jealous! I’m the storekeeper, Scarron. Please enjoy yourselves today!” he said while he twisted his body and bowed. Although he seemed kind of obscene, he complimented them so Montmorency was now in a better temper. She combed her hair with her fingers and said clearly, “Guide us to the cleanest table”.

“Every table in this store is scrubbed to shine as much as Her Majesty’s palace.”

Scarron lead the group to one of the tables. The bar seemed to be really prospering.

Just like the rumors said, girls wearing suggestive clothing were carrying wine and food.

Guiche, who was already looking around the bar in ecstasy, ended up with his ear being pulled by Montmorency.

After the party settled down around the table, a strawberry blond haired girl came to take the orders, but for some reason, hurriedly covered her face with a tray. Her whole body started to tremble slightly.

“Why are you hiding your face?” Guiche asked discontentedly. Without answering, she gestured to ask for the order. By looking at the girl’s hair color and height, Kirche quickly realized something and, for the first time this summer, an extra-large smile appeared on her face.

“So, what do you recommend?”

The girl who was hiding her face with a tray pointed at the neighboring table. On

it was a dish with a honey grilled baby chick wrapped in piecrust.

“And what’s the recommended wine?”

The girl pointed at a wine that had been served to another table, a well-aged Gernew wine.

Then Kirche said in a surprised tone, “Ah, Familiar-san is flirting with a girl!”

The girl came out from behind the tray and stared around the room with sharp eyes.

Everyone in the group except for Kirche shouted.

“Louise!”

Louise noticed the broad grin on Kirche’s face and realized that she had been tricked, and once again hid her face with the tray.

“It’s too late, La Vallière.”

“I’m not Louise.”

Louise spoke in a shaking voice. Kirche pulled on Louise’s arm and laid her on top of the table. Kirche grabbed on to the right arm, Guiche on the left, Tabitha grabbed the right leg and Montmorency held on to the left leg. The immobile Louise faced to the side and said with a shaky tone,

“I’m not Louise! Let go of me.”

“Really, what are you doing here?”

Louise would not answer. Snap! Kirche snapped her fingers and Tabitha cast a spell. With the power of the wind, Tabitha coiled the air around Louise and controlled her. Louise bounced on top of the table to a seiza pose.

“Wha-, What are you doing?!”

Kirche snapped her fingers once again. Silently, Tabitha waved her staff. The mass of air which controlled Louise became multiple invisible fingers and started to tickle her body.

“Ahahaha! Stop! It tickles! Stop!”

“So under what circumstances are you working here?”

“I’m not saying! Ahahaha!”

The fingers of air continued to tickle Louise but she wouldn’t confess. Eventually her body went limp.

“Such a tight-lipped kid. You've been hiding many things recently.”

“If you understand… then leave me alone…”

“Will do.”

Kirche picked up the menu dully.

“Hurry up and order something.”

“This,” said Kirche pointing at the menu.

“I can't tell, which?”

“Well first of all, everything written on this menu.”

“Huh?”

Louise stared at Kirche blankly.

“Just bring me everything.”

“You're really rich… I’m so envious.”

Kirche then said to Louise,

“Oh, of course it’s your treat. I’ll happily accept the offer, La Vallière-san.”

“What? Don’t sweet-talk! Why do I have to treat you?!”

“Or I’ll tell everyone in school that you're working here.”

Louise dropped her jaw.

“If you say it… I’ll, I’ll kill you.”

“Oh my, I wouldn’t want to die. So could you bring all the food quickly?”

Louise sadly dropped her shoulders and disappeared toward the kitchen while hitting many things on the way.

Guiche said shaking his head,

“You really are a nasty woman.”

Kirche happily replied.

“Don’t misunderstand me, I just don’t like that girl. We're basically enemies…”

Kirche cut off her speech and fixed Tabitha’s disorderly cloak.

“You should really fix that habit of messing up your hair and cloak when you cast spells. Women are about appearances and smarts are secondary.”

Kirche was fixing up Tabitha’s hair like an older sister taking care of a little sister or a mother worrying for her daughter.

Guiche looked at Tabitha. *Why does this mean Germanian woman trust Tabitha and only Tabitha?* thought Guiche. Although it was summer vacation, the two didn’t go home and stayed together at school. Moreover, they seemed to be communicating telepathically. Maybe it’s because Tabitha rarely speaks, but they were able to understand each other by just exchanging looks and were as close as sisters.

But… Guiche puzzled over his memory. They weren’t this close when they first enrolled. *I'm not sure because I was fooling around with other girls too much but didn’t they even start a duel?*

Just when Guiche wanted to inquire about it, a group of new customers came into the bar. They were good-looking nobles. They were wearing hats with large brims furnished with stylish feathers and had sword-shaped wands sticking out their cloak. They seemed to be officers from the royal army.

They probably had been training the whole day; they came in without a care and started to look around for tables.

The officer started to talk about the different girls in the bar. Many different girls poured the wine but none seemed to satisfy the officers. One officer noticed Kirche and winked at her.

“Isn’t that a noble girl? Women that could be together with us will have to carry a wand around!”

“That’s right! This is a rare break that her Majesty has given to us, the officers of the royal army. We can’t just have some commoners pour our wine.”

While saying such words, they were loudly deciding whom would go and pick up the girls. It seemed Kirche was used to these kinds of things and continued drinking wine calmly, but Guiche was feeling uneasy. He supposed himself to be in a position where he should be escorting the girls, but couldn’t be firm in front of nobles that were officers in the royal army. He would probably get beaten up.

Eventually the decision was made for whom to go talk to them. One of the nobles stood up. He was a handsome man who was just over twenty years old.

Full of confidence, he played with his mustache and elegantly bowed to Kirche.

“We are the officers that belong to the Navaaru regiment. We were stricken by your august beauty and would like to invite you to our dining table.”

Kirche answered without even looking.

“Sorry, but I’m having a good time with my friends.”

The officer’s friends started hooting. If he got rejected now, it would bruise his pride. He tried to persuade Kirche with enthusiastic words.

“I will plead you to ignore that. Please bestow a moment of happiness upon us

who have nothing but unforgiving battle awaiting us.”

But still, Kirche just waved him off.

The noble disappointed, went back to his friends .

“You’re not popular with women,” said an officer. But the young man shook his head.

“Did you hear her accent? She has to be a Germanian woman. Quite suspicious as a noble, if you ask me!”

“But I heard Germanian women are really lewd. Quite rare to see a woman with firm conduct.”

“Probably a Protestant to boot!”

Maybe it was partly because of the alcohol, but the officers started throwing insults against Kirche. Guiche and Montmorency looked at each other and asked Kirche if she wanted to leave the bar.

“But we were here first,” muttered Kirche as she stood up. Her long hair seemed to be burning as though it was a wild inferno. Other customers and waitresses and practically everyone who was watching the whole incident fell quiet.

“Ah, so have you changed you mind and decided to accompany us?”

“Yes, not with goblets… but with this.”

Kirche smoothly pulled out her wand.

The men fell out of their chair laughing.

“Don’t even try, young lady. We are nobles and will not point our wands at women.”

“Are you scared of Germanian women?”

“Ridiculous!”

The men continued laughing aloud.

“Then I will make you draw your wand.”

Kirche swung her wand. Fireballs equal to the number of men came out of the tip of her wand and instantly incinerated the decorative feathers on their hats. The bar stirred. Kirche stood up to bow to the audience.

The men who were being turned into the laughingstock stood up all at once.

“Miss, this joke has gone a little too far.”

“Really? But I’m always serious. And, wasn’t it you who invited me?”

“We invited you to drink, not to fight.”

“Then could I duel you gentlemen for insulting me just because I didn’t accept your offer to drink?”

The atmosphere in the bar froze.

One of the officers spoke determinedly,

“Foreign young lady, are you aware of the No Duel Policy? Under the order of Her Majesty, we are restricted from dueling. But you are a foreigner. As long as we reach an agreement among ourselves, we could do practically anything to you. Are you speaking under this knowledge?”

“Nobles in Tristain really give long speeches. If this was Germania, the duel would have ended by now.”

They couldn't back down after they had been made fun of like this. The officers looked at each other and one of them gripped his hat’s brim and said, “Choose your opponent, you have the right.”

But Kirche didn’t change her expression. But there was fiery anger swirling inside her. The more Kirche got mad, the more composed and mannered she became.

“As you have said, Germanian women are lewd, so I’ll take care of all of you

together.” Applause was heard inside the bar for Kirche’s brave words. The officers’ faces were flushed bright red due to anger from the insult.

“We are nobles but at the same time also soldiers. When insulted, when challenged, we will not hold back even if the enemy is a woman. Come.”

The noble pointed outside of the bar with his chin. Guiche was shaking under the situation. Montmorency was just drinking wine as though it was none of her business. Louise was talking about how the stupid woman was getting herself into useless trouble again and hiding in the kitchen. Saito unfortunately fell victim of Louise’s anger against Kirche and was passed out because of the pain that Louise had inflicted upon him; so he couldn’t intervene.

So, the one who stood up was Tabitha.

“You don’t have to worry about it. Sit down, it will be over in an instant.”

But Tabitha shook her head.

“Do you mean I won’t be able to beat them?”

“No. But I’ll go.”

“This doesn’t involve you,” said Kirche, but again Tabitha shook her head.

“I owe you.”

“You mean the incident in the Ragdorian Lake? Don’t mind it. I did it out of my own will anyways.”

“Not that.”

“Eh?”

Then Tabitha clearly muttered,

“Owe you one.”

Kirche recalled with those words.

“That’s quite a long time ago.” Kirche smiled.

She thought for a moment but finally decided to leave it to her friend.

“What happened? Got scared? We will forgive you if you apologize now.”

“You’ll still have to pour drinks for us though.”

“You’ll be lucky if it ends with you just pouring drinks.”

The officers laughed. Kirche pointed at Tabitha.

“Beg your pardon, but she has even more skill than me. She even has the title Chevalier.”

The officers put on a doubtful expression.

Tabitha just walked toward the entrance of the bar reticently.

“Do any of you gentlemen have the Chevalier title?”

The officers twisted their necks in disbelief.

“Then she should prove to be more than a match.”

As Kirche finished speaking, she sat down on a chair as though her job was over. The officers, who couldn’t back down, followed Tabitha to the outside of the bar.

“Is she gonna be ok?”

Asked Guiche. Kirche was just drinking her wine elegantly.

“That girl never forgets this kind of old fashioned promises.”

Kirche muttered happily.

Outside, Tabitha was facing the officers at 10 paces. Around them neighboring residents surrounded the duelers excitedly but also by keeping a good distance back. In reality, though the No Duel Policy was in effect, it didn’t all together

stop the fights between the nobles. This kind of fight was an everyday occurrence.

However… the opponent of the team of three apparent officers of the royal army was a very young little girl. That combination drew the attention of the spectators.

“Gentlemen, our opponent is a kid. After this people will call us bullies. Our honor is going to be ruined no matter if we win or lose. What shall we do?”

As the man that was inviting Kirche said, the youngest of three answered, “Why not let her act first?”

The man who was silent until now said in a happy tone,

“Hah, teaching children is an adult's responsibility!”

Chevalier? She must be joking. There is no way such a little girl can be given such a title.

Although she is a kid, she still is a noble. We cannot forgive such a lie. On top of that insulting an officer from the royal army is just absurd.

Tabitha was just standing ominously there with her staff in her right hand. Nothing could be inferred from her expression. It seemed neither the crowd nor the three officers could ruffle her emotions.

“Little lady, please draw your staff first.”

Said the oldest of the nobles.

The onlookers held their breath and watched over them attentively.

Tabitha simply waved her staff easily, like the time she made wind to cool off Kirche. The battle ended in an instant.

As the customers saw Tabitha coming back to the bar, they gave her a huge welcome mixed with astonishment and wonder. There was a huge commotion

outside. Because with just one hit from a huge “Air Hammer,” a hammer made of compressed air, Tabitha blew the officers to the other side of the street and knocked them out cold. One customer peeked outside the window timidly and saw that one of the officers had regained consciousness and was dragging the other two away.

“You are amazing despite your size!”

Although the bar was filled with applause, Tabitha was flipping a page in her book, not paying attention.

Kirche poured wine in to Tabitha’s cup with a smug expression.

“Let's have a toast.”

Guiche asked Kirche as if he was confused.

“Um, Kirche?”

“What?”

“Why are you two so close? You two are like sisters.”

“We just get along.”

But they were the opposite of each other. What’s more … Guiche pondered on what he recalled earlier. The two actually had a duel like the one outside as soon as they enrolled to the school.

“Were you two always this close? What happened between you two? Tell me.”

This also triggered Montmorency’s interest and she leaned forward.

“What happened? Tell us.”

Kirche looked at Tabitha, but Tabitha was silent. However Kirche nodded.

“She said I can talk about it so I will. It’s not that great of a story though.” Kirche took a full wine glass.

She gulped down the wine, and started telling the story with drowsy eyes.

Chapter 2

Kirche entered Tristain Magic Academy as Spring was in the air, during the fourth month, Feoh's moon's 2nd week, the middle of Heimdallr's week.

The entrance ceremony was held in Alvíss Hall. There, every year, the ninety or so new students would be divided into three classes. Children of aristocratic families, gathered from all over, had waited for Principal Osman with nervous looks on their faces.

Osman, leading the teachers, appeared on the 2nd floor and looked over the students a floor below.

“Students, you are Tristain's... Argh!”

Osman, spreading out his arms and legs, had jumped from the railing of the 2nd floor, preparing to land on a desk downstairs. In mid-air, he waved his staff to use “Levitation” to land safely, but failed. He'd grown old; the time he took to invoke spells had lengthened too much and he fell straight onto the desk. The hall was filled with an uproar as teachers jumped down to help him up. Osman had pulled something badly and someone had to heal him with Water magic. He continued, with no hint of embarrassment,

“Everyone, Become the aristocrats who will support Halkeginia in the future!”

Such brave words. Everyone started clapping, feeling pity for Osman who was trying so hard to maintain his composure.

In the crowd... There was a beautiful girl who stood out even amongst the nobles. This was Kirche, who held the title of “Ardent”. Giving a big yawn as she looked at the clumsy principal, she wondered if she'd made a mistake applying here.

For Kirche, however, who'd left Vindobona Magical Academy in Germania's capital... There were no further alternatives, other than going abroad to study.

Her parents staying in Zerbst had planned to marry Kirche, who'd been loafing around home after leaving school, off to some old Marquis. Kirche, who had no present desire for marriage, literally flew out of the country to Tristain seeking asylum.

Her impulses moved her to act.

From a young age, once she took a liking to something she did all she could to get it. If someone protested, she'd shut him up with her specialty, “Fire”. The reason for her dropping out, the “Incident” that had occurred in Germania, was a result of this aspect of her personality..

The personality you grow up with is a hard thing to change. Even in Tristain, her arrogant ways were in full play.

Getting back to the present, sitting next to Kirche was a petite, blue-haired girl. Compared to the beautiful goddess Kirche, possessor of a devil's body, this girl's body hadn't even hit puberty. She really was a child, after all. The jade eyes behind the glasses still carried a hint of childishness. Even though she was at an Entrance Ceremony, those eyes were still wide open, engrossed in reading her book.

For no apparent reason, Kirche started to get irritated with her attitude. To Kirche, good kids who liked to study were good targets for bullying. She asked in a low voice, “What are you reading?” and snatched away the book. The other girl looked at her with emotionless eyes.

The words in the book were too hard for Kirche, she couldn't understand a thing.

“The hell is this... 'Wind's Power's Influence on Atmospherics and Consequences'? Dunno what it's saying. Can you even use this kinda high level magic?”

The girl did not reply, only stretching out her hand.

“Hey, when you're asking a favor from someone, you should give your name, didn't your parents ever teach you?”

To be honest, it wasn't really asking a favor, just trying to get back something that had been taken away... The girl took a moment to consider, and said her

name - “Tabitha”.

“Whats that? Does everyone in Tristain use such weird names?”

Kirche was close to rolling on the floor in laughter. The teacher in charge of assigning classes shot her a glare, but Kirche, ignoring him, continued to laugh.

Tabitha looked at Kirche with cold eyes. The chain that held her parents' destinies... to hers had been mocked by someone. At that moment, Kirche totally didn't see the change in Tabitha eyes.

A girl with strawberry-blond hair, unable to take it any longer, stood right up.

“That girl over there! Something important is being announced now! Why don't you shut up!”

She'd probably been enduring Kirche's arrogance from before.

“Who are you? I am Louise Françoise Le Blanc de la Vallière. To think there are people like you attending, shocking!”

“La Vallière?”

Kirche looked happily at Louise's face.

“Please look after me. I'm Kirche von Zerbst, your neighbour. To think we'd meet here! What a privilege!”

On hearing this Louise's entire body began to tremble.

“W-W-What did you say?”

“Oh, please look after me.”

Kirche gave a charming laugh. A teacher who saw them shivering in rage roared at the three,

“All of you quiet down!”

“Okay.” Saying this, Kirche returned to her seat. Tabitha snatched her book back from Kirche's hand and glared at her from the corner of her eyes, her lips pressed

tight.

Every year was divided into three classes, named for the 3 legendary saints, Suen, Iyer and Seger. Kirche and Tabitha were in Suen, Louise in Iyer, while Guiche and Montmorency had been assigned to Seger.

After leaving a big impression at the entrance ceremony, Kirche was being ignored by the girls of her class. That special wild attractiveness of Germanian girls, as well as that generous bust, the hormones in the air just couldn't be shut out. In a second, she had all the boys in class to herself. This made the Tristain girls, already famous for being jealous, burn in envy.

Her personality was one of the reasons she was disliked. Even in Germania, the land of Fire, Kirche had been ostracized for her arrogance. Her personality just rubbed the Tristainians, who worshipped caution as a virtue, the wrong way. Within a short time of starting school, she'd already seduced three boys. There were two reasons. Firstly, those three boys were the better looking ones in class. Secondly, and more importantly... she was just so bored.

Number one, a seductive glance thrown in the hallway. Number two, sticking her bust out as she pretended to trip. Number three, crossing her legs in front of him.

Just like that, the three had already asked Kirche to go out with them. Kirche received their requests as though she were getting court summons. She went out with all three at the same time without hiding anything, and so the three were soon locked in combat.

At the end of the pitched battle, the third boy emerged victorious. Just as he was congratulating himself over finally getting Kirche to himself, she found a fourth one.

Several girls interested in these boys formed an alliance to negotiate with Kirche. Kirche, who'd just found five and six, and was once again three-timing, snorted with contempt at the forsaken girls.

“Don't you know when to stop? How many boys do you want before you're happy?”

“Who knows, I don't.”

Said Kirche as she sat at her desk polishing her nails.

“Quit acting dumb!”

“I didn't do anything. They just found me by themselves, saying 'Kirche, wanna come to my room and drink,' or 'I've written a poem, wanna hear it,' stuff like that.”

Kirche said, imitating the boys.

“It's always like this, I'm pretty irritated too, so I have to accept, in your language 'Oui'.” Did I pronounce it right?”

Her attitude made the girls' envy rocket to new heights instantly.

“Listen here. This is Tristain, where we prize prudence and tradition, unlike your barbarian country. Even in love there are proper ways. An ignorant country-girl who doesn't even know that should just go back home!”

“If you're really so concerned about your lover, why not lock him up in your room?”

“What did you say?”

“I'm just so confused. If you've got the time to be jealous, why not try to persuade him to stay?” If you like him you should compliment him a bit. All y'all only know how to put on an angry face, you don't even know how to say things that make a man happy, do you?”

“That's what guys should do!”

“Well I'm not like that, if I want someone, I'll praise him as much as possible, otherwise, I'm gonna be very sad.”

“Don't treat us like idiots!”

“However, all of you can rest assured. Although I follow the philosophy of “Do whatever it takes to get what I want,” I'd never take what's most important to someone.”

“Liar! Haven't you tried to grab our boyfriends with your dirty hands?”

Kirche turned her gaze slowly to the girls surrounding her.

“To you, It's really not the most important thing, is it.”

“What did you say?”

“If it was such an important thing, you wouldn't have formed a team to negotiate with me. You'd have taken my head off my shoulders a long time ago, or am I wrong?”

The jealous girls had nothing to say.

“...Er....”

“I don't want to die yet. Therefore, I won't take what's most precious from someone.”

The girls had been struck by Kirche's imposing manner and started to look at each other.

“If I plan on taking someone's most precious possession, I'll be ready to fight for it. My element is “Fire”. “Fire” controls destruction and passion. I too, want a passionate affair that turns all life to ash and burns everything to the ground.”

Just like that, Kirche's lovers continued to increase, but she was unable to make a single friend. Tabitha, however, was not much better off.

Tabitha hardly spoke to anyone at all. Whether it was break time or lunchtime, starting class or ending, even in the dorms or social spaces. She said nothing to anyone. Silent, with a world-weary look on her face... only reading. No matter who tried to speak to her, Tabitha totally ignored them. Not just ignored, it was as though she was totally ignorant of their even existing.

Because of this, Tabitha turned into an object of ridicule. For some reason, she refused to give her last name, so the rumors were that she was a bastard.

The time when she really raised the ire of the entire class was during their first class.

Tabitha, who'd been taken as just a 'normal' bookworm, was found to be an adept “Wind” mage during the first “Wind” magic lesson.

Mr. Quito was in charge of “Wind” class. The first words out of his mouth were,

“This year's students are just too sorry.”

Displeasure was immediately written on the faces of the students, who'd gathered in the central courtyard.

“Looking at your school record, almost all of you are 'dot' mages, only a few are 'line'. Not even one is a 'triangle' mage. What's going on?”

Dot and triangle referred to the number of elements that could be stacked. 'Dot' meant one element, 'line' meant the mage could combine two. Even if it was the same element, as long as it could be stacked, a powerful spell could be created.

“I have absolutely no hopes for any of you, but this is my job, after all.”

After Mr. Quito finished speaking in a low voice, class started. “Wind”'s basic skill's are “Flight” and “levitation”.

However... Tabitha began to show her abilities at this point.

She was the first to soar far up quickly using the “Flight” spell. Even so, to try to avoid attention, she'd deliberately not used all her power. Mr. Quito was rather confused.

“For a 'dot' mage, that pretty good.”

Not knowing Tabitha's true ability, it was unavoidable that he'd say that.

For various reasons, the only person who knew Tabitha's real power was Principal Osman. Moreover, Mr. Quito hadn't looked at the exchange students' records.

“No matter what, all of you lost out to the youngest girl in class. Don't you feel ashamed?”

With Mr. Quito's words, the entire class started to get angry.

During the break after lunch, one of the boys asked Tabitha to spar with him.

Sparring like this was basically the same as dueling. Since it was sparring, there was no little danger of any loss of life, at least not in this time period. In times past, it was said that giving your opponent the coup de grace was the way of the noble, but that age of heroes had disappeared into history. The modern method was to use spells with low lethality, and once someone was injured, the bout would be decided. Although at times there were incidents were a finger was broken, it was far safer than placing one's life on the line. In most cases, stealing your opponent's wand was considered the most elegant way of winning.

The youth who had challenged Tabitha was named de Lorraine. Born into a family famous for “Wind” magic, he was one of their year's elite 'line' magicians.

He carried a grudge from having been beaten at “Flight” by some unknown like Tabitha. He liked to boast that there was no one who could compete with him in “Wind” magic, and wanted a chance to get back at Tabitha.

Walking towards Tabitha, reading in the central courtyard, he issued a declaration of war,

“Milady, I would like your instruction in “Wind” magic.”

When Tabitha gave no reply, de Lorraine started to get angry.

“To continue reading while someone is challenging you, isn't this far too rude?”

Tabitha still did not reply. De Lorraine's words went by her ears unheard as though it were sound of the breeze.

“So, when it comes to sparring you don't have what it takes. That isn't hard to understand. After all, these contests put one's life on the line! Totally different from flying and jumping around a bit in class!”

Tabitha continued to flip through her book. De Lorraine's insulting words had no effect on the jade-eyed girl.

“Heh!”

De Lorraine snorted, and smirked.

“So. It seems that the rumors of you being a bastard are true. I fear you don't even know who your mother is. To feel envious of some low-born person like you would dishonor my family's reputation!”

As he gave these words and prepared to leave, Tabitha finally stood up. If Kirche were to see her now she would probably feel it. Within those emotionless jade eyes, an icy wind was howling.

“Have you finally gotten serious?”

Tabitha set her book down on the bench, and turning, walked towards an open area.

Tabitha and de Lorraine stood facing each other about ten meters apart.

“Although I don't want to give my name to a bastard like you, this is the common practice. I, Verrieres de Lorraine, shall be your opponent.”

Tabitha did not give her name.

“It's so pitiful to not have a name to give, even at a time like this! I shall not show mercy! En guarde!”

De Lorraine shouted, and began to chant, “Wind Break.” He planned to send Tabitha flying at once. Tabitha did not take a stance, and merely silently prepared to take the wind that seemed set to blow her away.

What was going on? She totally made no attempt to take an invocation stance. De Lorraine's “Wind Break” was a powerful spell, a spell to counter it would take some time to cast.

Was it because she had never sparred like this before, or had she been scared witless by de Lorraine's spell...

Whatever the reason, time was up.

Just as de Lorraine felt he had victory in his hand...

Tabitha raised her wand, and as though clearing spiderwebs from her path, waved it randomly. A single word was spoken, and just like that, Tabitha had control of all the air currents in the area.

This minute adjustment in air flow changed de Lorraine's spell's forward momentum, returning it to the caster.

De Lorraine was flung against the wall by his own wind. Giving him no time, Tabitha immediately began to cast again. Water vapour in the air froze to ice, turning into countless frozen arrows, which plunged towards de Lorraine.

“Ah!”

With a clear tinkling sound, the ice arrows pinned de Lorraine to the wall by his cloak and clothes. He was scared stiff by this power he had seen for the first time in his life. “Wind,” could it really be all that powerful? A giant ice arrow flew towards the pinned de Lorraine from the front.

“I'm going to die! Save me!"

He shouted reflexively. The arrow, as thick as his arm, stopped in front of his eye. It started to melt, turning into a puddle.

At the same time, the arrows that pinned his body to the wall too began to melt.

The newly released de Lorraine trembled uncontrollably. At his feet, a pool began to form, not from the defrosting ice arrows, but from some other liquid. From between his legs liquid flowed, forming a body-temperature puddle. He sank to his knees.

Throwing away his wand, and begging, ”Please spare me,” he crawled away.

Tabitha's little feet suddenly filled his vision, scaring him so much that he shrieked. She stood there looking down at him, her expression unchanging.

“Spare me! Let me live! S-Sparring's merely a game! Duels where you gamble your life are old history!”

De Lorraine said, denying everything he had said earlier. Tabitha stuck out a wand.

“Let me go! If you let me live, I'll do anything you say!”

Tabitha pointed at the wand in her hands, saying simply,

“You forgot this.”

It was the wand de Lorraine had thrown away.

Those were the reasons why Kirche and Tabitha were hated by the rest of their class... Kirche especially by the girls whose boyfriends she had stolen, and Tabitha by de Lorraine, who she had beaten so badly.

De Lorraine suggested a plan to the girls.

On hearing his plan, the girls clapped and agreed. This would keep their identities from being known and take care of the two most hated girls in class.

Chapter 3

The welcoming dance party for the new students would be held on the weekend of the second week, the week of Heimdallr, in the month of Ur. As the focus of the party was the new students, the senior students decorated the hall and entertained the new students as hosts.

The table was filled with delicacies prepared specially to welcome the stomachs of the new students. The splendidly dressed seniors were discussing which new juniors to invite for a dance.

Needless to say, the most eye-catching person was naturally the foreign student studying at the academy from Germania, Kirche.

Basically, the new students were still not used to social activities, so in terms of their tastes in attire, or dancing moves, they were still considered very bad. Consequently, they were not qualified to be dance partners of the senior students yet. Nonetheless, this new Germanian student who had been very “lively” in the social sector in all manners was another case. She possessed a strong sexy charm, her beauty was comparable to a flower giving off the scent of sweet nectar. The chatting topic of these senior students was focused on who would invite this new student for a dance.

And so, when Kirche -wearing a black sexy dancing gown that brought out her well-developed breasts even more, her hair combed to a hairstyle popular on the streets, and adorning a ruby necklace that symbolized a slight fever- appeared, all the gentlemen in the area gave an emotional sigh. The sigh spread out like a ripple, and in a moments notice, Kirche had captured the eyes of all the people in the area.

The females at the scene, upon seeing Kirche’s appearance, shifted their eyes away, and began finding faults with her dressing and hairstyle. This was because having the attention grabbed by a foreign female had made them feel very unhappy.

The male seniors surrounded Kirche, all trying to invite her to dance. Kirche showed a proud expression, and squinted her eyes like an arrogant queen.

As soon as Kirche took up a wineglass, there would be someone pouring grape wine for her. Whenever she bit a piece of cheese, there would be someone bringing her a plate with meat. If she told a joke, everyone would laugh heartily. Kirche's every move drew the eyes of everyone at the scene.

The music had started. Kirche chose a noble to be her dance partner. He was a tall and handsome second year student. This handsome guy showed a smile like a perfect sculpture, and kissed the back of the hand Kirche stretched out to him. Anyone could tell easily that these two were the highlight of the day.

There were a bunch of people on their seats a distance away, watching this with ice cold eyes.

They were the group that intended to take revenge on Kirche and Tabitha. One of them, who bore love for that second year handsome student, bit her handkerchief and shook her head in anger.

"Ah~~ What is that! How dare she get so close to Pelisson-sama…"

The leader of this revenge group, Thonet Charente, said softly as she flicked her gray hair.

"Just watch. We are going to shame you right before everybody…"

Following that, she sent a signal to De Lorraine. He had been hiding behind the curtains at a corner of the hall, waiting for this moment to arrive.

He followed the script that he had practiced beforehand, and began chanting a spell while pointing his wand at Kirche.

Kirche was holding onto the second year student and walking into the hall, when suddenly, a small whirlwind wrapped around her body.

"What is this?"

Before she finished her sentence, the whirlwind began to twist and turn and entangled her gown.

“Huh? Oh?”

Countless thin small wind blades cut Kirche’s skirt and underwear, tearing them to shreds.

“Wahhhhhhhhhhhhh!”

The one who gave off this scream of exclamation was not Kirche, but a girl standing near her. Other than the shoes at her feet, Kirche was just like a newborn, dumbly standing at the center of the hall, naked.

The second year student who was supposed to be with Kirche had a nosebleed, and fell after losing a pool of blood. All the gentlemen at the scene, including the teachers, all stared straight at Kirche, as if swallowing her whole being. As for the ladies who did not have a good impression of Kirche, even though they gave off something similar to a sigh of pity towards this sudden incident, in their hearts they were laughing in secret, feeling that their unhappy feelings were vented out.

Yet… Kirche did not panic from this unfortunate accident, and instead, she brought her queen stance into play.

She did not cover her bronze-colored body, which was giving off a wild charm, at all. She walked to the side of the wall, looking very natural, and sat on the sofa there.

And, under the stare of surrounding students, she crossed her legs, murmuring comments like “it got cooler”. At this moment, the culprit, De Lorraine acted indifferently and walked over.

“What a disaster.” He said as he draped his coat over Kirche.

“Just who… Did, did such a thing…”

De Lorraine said, shifting his eyes away from the body Kirche was so proud of. His face could not help but blush red.

“Basically I can more or less guess who it is.”

Kirche stared at a bunch of girls in the far corner. They were looking in this direction, and smirking as they whispered to each other.

De Lorraine placed his mouth by the side of Kirche’s ear.

“Erm… I saw someone that seemed like the culprit in the shadows from the curtains…”

Kirche used suspicious eyes to look at De Lorraine.

“Oh… Really?”

“Yes. If I tell you who it is, would you go on a date with me?”

De Lorraine repeated from the script that they had prepared beforehand. Mainly because Thonet Charente argued very strongly that, by asking this, Kirche was more likely to believe what he said.

Kirche studied De Lorraine slightly. He had a face that looked rather inflexible… He belonged to the type that, even though confident in their studies and magic, had absolutely no idea about boy-girl relationships. It looked as though he might be secretly in love with her?

Kirche gave a charming smile. Looking down on him, she thought to herself: *What is this? So this guy is just another secret admirer of mine.* For people who are overly narcissistic, their eyes that are meant to see the truth tend to be blinded very easily as well.

“Sure, so tell me.”

De Lorraine told Kirche softly.

“…It was a small sized girl. She was looking at you and waved her wand, so I think that it must be her.”

“So then who is she?”

“I did not get to see the face clearly though.”

De Lorraine seemed embarrassed as he added.

“Yeah, after that, my attention was shifted onto you, with your gown turned into cloth strips. It was after that that I thought that she might be the culprit for this. But when I turned my head again, she was no longer there."

“Oh… Is there anything with you that can act as proof?”

De Lorraine took out a thread of hair from his pocket. That was a thread of blue hair.

“This hair color is very uncommon.”

“To possess hair of such color, there shouldn’t be many?”

De Lorraine nodded.

“Thank you, I think I know who it is.”

Kirche said so softly, looked across the area and… Her eyes stopped at a small girl wearing spectacles. *That kid, I think her name was Tabitha?*

De Lorraine, who is standing beside me now, didn’t he have a duel with her? As she was not interested in this sort of thing, she had only heard a little of what happened.

“Didn’t you have a duel with her?”

“Yes.” De Lorraine nodded. “Though it is shameful, but I lost very miserably.”

“So I heard. The reason for the duel?”

“Because she was very disrespectful towards me, I said: “I wonder what your mother is like.” As you know, that girl has a strange name right? She must be hiding lowly birth. The moment I said that, she suddenly acted, that is why I lost against her.”

De Lorraine lied.

Kirche tilted her head and thought about it.

She had made fun of her for a bit during the entrance ceremony, could that be the reason? Besides, she seemed to have made fun of her name before.

She narrowed her eyes and stared at Tabitha, her face showing a cold smile.

Seeing this scene, De Lorraine judged that his plan seemed to be going smoothly, he couldn't help but give a smirk in his heart.

Kirche appeared to be completely convinced… That Tabitha bore a hatred towards her for making fun of her name, and consequently took revenge.

The reason Thonet Charente presented this idea to De Lorraine was because she remembered that there had been some friction between Kirche and Tabitha during the entrance ceremony, so she put that incident into use in this plan.

The next morning… Kirche walked into the classroom, and sat beside Tabitha. Tabitha on the other hand read her book without moving. Kirche took action and snatched her book over.

Tabitha looked towards Kirche, those blue eyes that still did not allow others to detect any emotions in them shone with a certain glow.

“You… The method of revenge you thought of is really clever.”

Tabitha did not reply.

“Is it that unforgivable to have your name made fun of?”

Tabitha tilted her head, looking at Kirche, she did not seem to understand that Kirche meant that incident.

Kirche threw pieces of her gown before Tabitha.

“This is very expensive.”

Tabitha used her finger to rub the cloth, and looked at it for a while.

“I intend to make you suffer the same humiliation, will you accept that?”

Tabitha shook her head, as if implying “I have no idea what you are talking about.”

“Stop acting. You excel at “Wind” magic right? I hated the wind originally, but now I hate it even more. To be like you, sneaking at some dark corner to release a whirlwind… That is really too annoying!”

“It wasn’t me.”

With things developed to such a state, Tabitha finally opened her mouth.

“Things have already gotten to this stage, and you still intend to act innocent?”

Kirche’s red hair danced like fire. She showed an effortless smile and said in a calm voice.

“Then remember this, it shouldn’t take long for me to make you remember it.”

With that, Kirche stood up and walked back to her seat.

Thonet Charente and De Lorraine sneakily hid at one corner of the classroom to eavesdrop on their conversation; following that they exchanged glances, and secretly gave a smile.

They initiated the second part of their plan very quickly.

After school that day, Tabitha returned to her room, only to find it in a pathetic state. The room was filled with a burnt smell, books, which had been Tabitha’s only friend, and the bookshelf to put them were all burnt to pieces. Tabitha picked up the remains of one of the burnt books. The pages inside were burnt to ashes, and flew off, falling back onto the floor.

Tabitha bit her lips hard. She used her emotionless eyes to look around, and found a thread of hair that fell onto her bed. She picked up that thread of hair and with the kerosene lamp in her room, she saw the red long hair shining with luster.

Within Tabitha’s deep blue eyes, a strong cold blizzard began to blow.

Deep in the night, there was a knock on Kirche’s door.

Kirche had been furious about having provided her body at the party for free for the admiring of all the students and teachers in school, she asked the person outside the door: “Who is it?”

“It is me.”

It was Tabitha’s voice. The side of Kirche’s lips raised in a vigorous manner, revealing a cruel smile that would never be displayed before others. She opened the door to her room.

Tabitha held a large wand in her hand, standing outside the door.

“You finally intend to settle things once and for all?”

Kirche asked, looking from above at this girl whose height was only up to her chest. Tabitha did not reply, and just used cold eyes to stare at Kirche.

Those eyes gave a clear reply to Kirche’s question.

“Location?”

Kirche asks once more.

“Anywhere is fine.”

“Time?”

“Now.”

“Good.”

Kirche took up her wand, and walked off before Tabitha.

At the center of the Vestri Courtyard that barely had anyone there even in the day, Kirche and Tabitha turned their bodies to face each other. It seemed that the moon would be their only audience.

Yet… There were other spectators hiding behind bushes or the shadow of the tower. That would be De Lorraine, or the group of girls seeking revenge, with Thonet Charente as their leader. And Thonet Charente was the culprit for sneaking into Tabitha's room and burning her bookshelf.

This bunch of people were rejoicing over the success of their plan. They wanted to witness the final results, and so they arrived here, sneaking up behind Tabitha and Kirche.

Darkness quietly surrounded the cold moist air in the night of spring.

Kirche raised her wand before her.

"Firstly, I would like to apologize. Regarding making fun of your name… I have no bad intentions. As you can see, this is just my personality~ It seems that unintentionally, I tend to make others angry."

Tabitha placed her big wand down towards the ground, and was prepared to chant a spell anytime.

"But, I never expected you to make me suffer such a humiliation, so I will not go easy on you."

Yet Kirche noticed that Tabitha was still very small. Even though she was really angry, but to fight against a girl as young as her… Is this really right? This query appeared in her heart faintly.

"Don't take me for a normal flirt and underestimate my capabilities. I am a von Zerbst of Germania, you have heard of it right?"

Tabitha nodded.

"Then, you should know the rumors that my family has on the battlefield. My family is cheerful and free like fire, but we are not just that. We will cheerfully and freely burn everything to ashes. And not just our enemies… Sometimes even our own men if they do not listen to us."

Tabitha looked at Kirche motionlessly, the expression on her face seemed to be saying: "So what?"

"The thing I am most boastful about is the Zerbst flame that flows within my body. So as long as something obstructs my path, no matter what it is, I will burn it to a crisp. Even if it is our King… Or a child, they are all the same."

Tabitha began spell-chanting. It seemed that Kirche’s threatening words did not have any effect on Tabitha.

“I have already warned you.”

Kirche waved her wand. Because of the considerable amount of military training she had received, when she got serious, her chanting speed was faster than anyone else.

From the tip of her wand a fireball, not conservative in terms of size or power, flew towards Tabitha. Tabitha changed her spell in an instant, making an ice wall right before herself.

A thick ice wall blocked Kirche's fireball… And melted into water. But this ice wall was unable to completely block Kirche's fireball, causing Tabitha's hair to be burnt by the spitting flames.

Tabitha jumped backwards, and then turned defense into attack. She made the water vapour in the air condense into ice, sending ice arrows flying at Kirche from all directions. She was serious as well, compared to the time when she nailed De Lorraine to the wall last time, the number of ice arrows was about three times as many… All hurdling straight towards Kirche.

Kirche waved her wand. Flames spinned around her body, wrapping onto the sharp ice blades, and melting them entirely. But, one of the ice arrows that had yet to melt completely scratched her cheek.

A drop of fresh blood fell along Kirche's cheek.

Yet… Both Kirche and Tabitha stopped after that… The attacks from both sides ended there.

Both of them lowered their wands, and stared at each other.

Kirche stretched her tongue out to lick the blood that was falling down her cheek.

Tabitha used her hand to check her burnt hair as well.

De Lorraine who was hiding in the bushes asked Thonet Charente beside him, who was holding her breath to observe the battle.

"…What is going on? Is it over already?"

"…How should I know. Geez, get on with the fight already. There's no result yet

is there?”

Why did Tabitha and Kirche stop fighting after releasing one attack each? De Lorraine and Thonet Charente could not understand the reason at all.

“What a headache… It seems that this is a misunderstanding after all.” Kirche said, pouting.

This mindless speech made De Lorraine and gang even more confused. Now is not the time to make such a relaxed speech is it? The two of them should be dueling, betting their lives on it shouldn’t they?

Tabitha seemed to have the same opinion as Kirche, and nodded.

Following that, she walked up to Kirche, and handed the burnt book to Kirche. Kirche took a look, and shook her head, saying.

“I didn’t do this.”

Tabitha raised her head to look up at Kirche. Kirche gave a faint smile, and patted her shoulder.

“My, if there is something I want, I would rob it, but my rule is to 'not rob the most treasured items of others'.”

Tabitha openned her mouth to say.

“Why?”

“Because, if I rob that, it would cause a situation where I have to risk my life, isn’t that kind of thing very troublesome?”

Kirche laughed cheerfully.

Tabitha, led by Kirche, revealed a tiny smile.

Kirche seemed to have noticed that smile, and said to Tabitha.

“You are cuter when you smile like this.”

After that, Kirche raised her wand high. A few tiny fireballs were fired towards

the sky like fireworks, lighting up the area as though it was morning.

De Lorraine and gang who had been hiding amidst the darkness were instantly revealed in this light.

“Hi! Hiiiiiiii!"

“You people… What are you doing here?”

“N-no, just taking a stroll!”

“A stroll? Go for that a little later. Yeah, regarding the humiliation I suffered thanks to you… I would like to 'repay' you.”

The girls and De Lorraine intended to run, but their legs were tied tightly by Tabitha’s ropes of wind.

Kirche closed in upon De Lorraine who fell down.

“W-W-Why!”

“Are you trying to ask how we realized it?”

De Lorraine nodded vigorously as if he had a cramp.

“Listen well, have you heard the phrase 'The strong will know the strong?' When you become 'Triangle class' like us, you will be able to understand the level of the magic being cast on you. The whirlwind that tore my gown at the party, compared to the ice arrows this child has used just now, even though they are both of “wind” magic, the magical powers in the two are completely different!”

“Hi! Hi! Hiiiii!"

Hearing the term 'Triangle Mages', all the people who fell to the floor were so scared they began trembling.

“Tabitha and I realized that both of us are triangle mages; that is why we let our wands down. If burnt by my flames, how can there be any book that retains its original shape? Remember well, my “fire” will burn everything 'to a crisp'.”

De Lorraine struggled to get up to escape. Tabitha was about to chant a spell, but

Kirche stopped her.

“Leave it to me.”

Tabitha shook her head.

“What are those books! I will become your friend in place of your books! But my humiliation… I am unable to find anything in replacement. So, I will take revenge for you as well, just watch!”

Something warm was created within Tabitha’s heart. Ever since she had abandoned her name, this is the first time someone had said something like “become your friend”.

This sentence… Seemed to have made the blizzard that has been rampaging in her heart melt slightly… Tabitha had that feeling.

“I owe you one.”

Tabitha nodded to say.

Her voice was very soft… She sounded a little shy, and there seemed to be a little happiness mixed in her tone. Having someone whom she could owe something to, this made Tabitha very happy without knowing why.

“Fine, you shall owe me for now. You better return the favor in the future!”

Kirche used a calm voice and a solemn demeanor to begin spell-chanting. A fireball flew at De Lorraine and his gang, who had no idea which way to run to.

The queen of flames sent more fireballs in concession, her actions seemed as though she was dancing, her tone sounded as though she was singing in happiness……

The angrier Kirche got, the cooler her speech, and the calmer her attitude.

Chapter 4

After listening to the story of their past, Montmorency seemed to find it hard to believe and said,

“So that incident with De Lorraine and Thonet Charente’s hair and clothes burnt, and even hung upside down on the tower, was done by you!”

“That’s right", Kirche nodded cheerfully, admitting it.

The next morning, when De Lorraine and Thonet Charente were rescued from the tower, they insisted that they had climbed up to hang themselves upside down on their own. But the truth behind that incident? No one knows. It seems that they might have been threatened by Kirche.

Guiche nodded hard in agreement.

“That is to say, just now when Tabitha used "owe you one" as her reason, and took on the duel for you… Is due to you taking revenge for Tabitha as well then?”

Kirche nodded.

“Yup.”

Louise, who was originally serving wine and dishes, and Saito, who had been washing plates in the kitchen, had joined the group at the table, and were listening attentively.

Louise, who was wearing a thin shoulder strap close-fit vest and skirt, used an indifferent tone to say.

“But, that time you were just intending to punish De Lorraine and gang yourself, so you robbed Tabitha’s right to revenge by your own account right? So what is there to say she owes you one?”

“You can say that too.”

“You are really overboard.”

Guiche expressed his views in a helpless tone.

“I, am really…”

“Really what…?”

“Really willful… Maybe that's the case?”

Kirche shook her head and mumbled, vexed. Everyone sighed deeply. *So this person never realized it all along!*

“You do not really need to take the place of this woman for that duel, right? According to what she said herself… As Louise said earlier, you owe her nothing.” Montmorency said to Tabitha, who was reading a book.

No------ Tabitha was shaking her head in objection to Montmorency’s comment. She didn't feel that she owed Kirche because Kirche helped her take revenge then.

“*I will become your friend.*” This sentence was the reason why Tabitha felt that she owed Kirche.

In other words, that was a proof of their friendship. So… If Kirche were humiliated by others, she would fight for her in replacement, and she viewed this action as proof of their friendship.

What is owed, must be returned.

Yet Tabitha did not go the extra mile to try to explain this, and just nodded slightly.

“Huaaaaa~” Kirche made a big yawn. “Drinking wine and chatting for so long, I feel sleepy.”

“Is that so, good, go back already.” Louise replied in a cold tone.

“It is so troublesome to go back~ I want to stay here.”

“What about the money?”

“Thanks for the treat.”

“What is that you are saying! How much do you think this meal costs!”

“I am going to tell everyone in the academy...”

Louise shut up and lowered her head.

Following that, Kirche dragged Tabitha and stood up, going up to the guestroom area on the second story and leaving Montmorency, Guiche, Saito, and Louise still sitting there.

“That, that, that woman! One, one, one day I will definitely kill her…” Louise was so angry that her whole body kept on shaking.

Guiche pulled the lower portion of Montmorency’s clothes.

“What are you doing?”

“Let’s, let’s stay here today?”

“…Fine, but there must be two beds!”

“You will pay for your own bills, right!?” Louise glared at the two of them.

“Err, we don't have any money… Don’t be so calculating, since you are paying for those two already, might as well pay for us as well.”

“What the hell are you talking about!”

As Louise was shouting at the two, Saito recalled that he had given them his money last time, and then he heard nothing about it. At first, they said they needed money to make the antidote for the love potion, so he should have given them around five hundred écu gold then. He had not gotten his money back from them up till now.

“Hey Guiche.”

“What is it?”

“I gave you guys some money, right? Return it quickly.”

Guiche and Montmorency put on awkward expressions and looked at each other.

Saito began sweating a cold sweat down his back.

“Hey… Don’t tell me you guys spent it all already?”

“No… No we didn’t… Just that…”

“What?”

“Erm, that is to say… Due to the necessary expenditures when making the medicine…” Montmorency gave a smile as if trying to curry favor with Saito.

“So you spent it all, right!?”

“I will return you the money after some time!”

“How long is some time! You poor noble!”

“Who are you calling poor!”

Then, just as they intended to put up an ugly fight…

The nobles that were taken care of by Tabitha earlier came into the shop once more. They noticed Guiche and Montmorency, and walked over.

“What do you guys want?” Saito asked.

Guiche and Montmorency were shocked, and began shivering following that.

The middle aged noble among the group spoke.

“Where did the ladies earlier go?”

“They, they went upstairs to rest.” Montmorency replied as she was trembling.

The military officers looked at each other.

“They got away?”

“Seems like it.”

“May, may I know what is the matter?” Guiche queried.

The other party gave a cheerful smile and replied.

“No, it is nothing much. We just thought that we might thank them, regarding what happened earlier. But, if it is just the few of us, we may not be able to thank them properly… So, please look, like this, we brought an entire squadron over.”

Louise and gang were shocked, and hurriedly looked outside the shop.

Because there were several hundreds of military men lined up outside, the scene scared them so much that they almost fell off their chairs.

“Stand attention~~~ Line up towards your right!!”

After the military officer standing before the squad shouted out the commands loudly, all the soldiers adjusted their groups instantly, the weapons in their hands gave off a clear sound.

“I will get them down now!” Guiche stood up, and intended to escape to the second storey.

“No, no, no, if you escape as well, then we would be very troubled. No problem, it is fine for their friends to accept our thanks as well. Because, be it taking revenge for a friend, or taking revenge in place of a friend… They all are part of the privileges of being friends, and a duty as well.”

Saito and gang hurriedly tried to make their escape. But they were easily caught by the military officers. The four of them were dragged out of the shop together.

“You guys should be expert magicians as well! Since you are friends of those two ladies! So please, don’t be shy, you must show us your strength!”

“Help! We are not their friends!”

The screams of the four of them echoed in the night skies.

Two hours later……

In the end, Kirche still had not drank enough, and came down to the shop… And she found Louise, Montmorency, Guiche and Saito lying on the table, barely alive.

The group were beat up by those military men, and were half-dead. Louise had used too much "explosion" magic in the past few days, and that consumed all her willpower. Saito, as usual, had left Derflinger at the small room at the attic, and so was of no use. As for Guiche, he was taken down in a mere two seconds. Since Montmorency hated fighting, she made a declaration of neutrality, but the other party did not accept what she said.

Kirche, who knew nothing of what had happened, scratched her head, at a loss.

“You guys… What happened?”

The party lying on the table used a hateful voice to reply at the same time.

“You owe us one!”

Story 3: Tristania's Holiday

Chapter 1

The bell of Saint Rémy‘s temple rang eleven o‘clock.

Saito was running towards a central plaza of the De Chicton street.

As to why he was running... well, that's because he was late for a date. He elbowed his way through the mass of people, barely making it to the central plaza, and saw the one who was waiting for him pouting.

“H-hey."

Seeing Saito, Louise, who was sitting at the fountain, puffed out her cheeks.

“What‘s up with you?! You're late!”

“No... when I was about to leave I was caught by Scarron.”

“Just ignore him!”

“I can‘t, for the time being, he is my employer...”

Nagging, Louise urged Saito. *Aah, I should have saved my head and not come to the date if she was going to be angry like this.*

Louise was dressed for the occasion. She was embarrassed, because even though she looked gorgeous, her clothes were still not suitable for a noble… She was dressed in a recent trend, popular among town girls – black beret and black dress with a plunging neckline. The pendant that Saito gave her was hanging on her neck. In these clothes she really looked like a true town girl. As one would expect from a girl in her pubescence, it was hard for Louise to acquire a suitable dress in town.

Aah, when silent, she really looked pretty charming. With her arms folded and tilted chin… the young girl looked across the street intently. Her strawberry-

blond hair shined vividly in the rays of the sun. Her big hazel eyes were an obvious sign that she was from another world. Aah, his lovely master looked very cute right now, furiously tapping her feet.

“Hey, lets go! Before the play starts.”

Louise said, still sounding little shy.

Saito nodded and started to walk. However, Louise remained standing in her place.

“What is it?”

“Muu! Escort me properly!”

“Escort?”

“Right. Hey!”

Louise pulled Saito's arm.

“Kuh?” He looked dumbfounded at their united arms.

Holding hands! It made Saito very awkward. Though she had used his hands as pillows to sleep on lately, he still wasn’t used to them walking while holding hands in the middle of town. Saito felt nervous. Then she stepped on his foot.

“W-what?!”

“During our Void day off you should lead me. Why won’t you say something? Uuuuh!”

Louise groaned.

“W-well, this is our Void day. H-how about going to the t-theater?”

Louise shook her head while sighing, and then pulled his arm dragging him after her.

“Muu! Useless escort! This way! Here!”

And so, walking in a way that still was not clear who was escorting whom, the pair went down the streets of Tristain, bathing in the sunlight of summer.

Well, as to why the couple went to see a play…

Today was the day of Rag and the inn was closed. “I want to go to the play,” Louise had said early in the morning, when she was having her breakfast (though it actually was a dinner, because they went to sleep late yesterday) with Saito in the attic.

“Play?”

“That’s right.”

Louise muttered somewhat ashamed.

“You like things like plays?"

“I don't like them, but I want to see one.”

“See it?”

Louise nodded. When you think about it, she grew up in a different environment. Louise was strictly disciplined at home, so she probably never went to the town’s theater.

Thinking this way, Saito suddenly felt pity for Louise.

“All right, but why do you want to see a play now?”

“Jessica told me that today there is a very popular play on stage.”

Louise was a girl after all and fashionable things attracted her just like any other.

And…

Louise for some reason insisted that this be a date.

“It doesn’t feel right just going there. The mood is important! Therefore let’s meet each other!”

“Meet?”

“All right? Meet me in front of the fountain, in the central plaza.”

“Bothersome.”

“Not bothersome. Hence, lets go to Royal Tanaijiiru Theater.”

“Fuu~n.”

And so, they met.

Royal Tanaijiiru Theater was indeed majestic, a splendid theater of gorgeous stonework. The lined up columns made it look like a temple.

Gentlemen and ladies fashionably dressed up gathered up in the theater.

Saito followed them as well.

After buying a surprisingly cheap ticket from the box office, Saito headed towards the seat. A thick curtain was dropped over the stage, and it was gloomy around it… indeed, Saito was getting excited by the mysterious atmosphere.

Seats were marked by numbers and it was written on a ticket where one should sit, however agitated, Saito, without noticing, sat down in a different seat.

When he and Louise waited for the play to start, a good looking middle-aged noble with beautiful silver hair tapped his shoulder.

“Listen, pal.”

“Y-yes?”

“This is the seat I have had reserved for some time. Isn’t your seat different?”

This being said, the number of the seat was confirmed. It was as the man said. Hastily Saito, being urged by Louise, stood up.

“Muu! You have no shame!”

Louise complained shaking her head. Searching for the seat, Saito asked Louise.

“What was the play again?”

“…Tristania’s Holiday.”

“What’s the plot?”

“Princess of a certain country and the prince of a certain country come to Tristania secretly. The pair meet each other hiding their identities, however once they fall in love… they learn each other’s identities and separate. A sad story.”

Such a story shared a great popularity among the young girls. And indeed, the theater was crowded with young women.

After he found his seat, with much effort, the curtain rose. The play started. Music played and… it sounded beautiful in the theater.

“Amazing.”

Louise watched the stage with absorbed interest.

Saito, who was seeing a Halkeginia play for the first time, at first gazed at it attentively as well. However… he got tired soon.

The scenario wasn’t so bad – he thought. Yet, the actors were unskilled. Though Saito was not very interested in plays, he still saw various movies back on earth and saw some school plays as well.

Compared to that… these guys were ham actors. Occasionally the voice turned inside out and singing scenes were executed in a tone-deaf manner. Was this really a royal opera?

Yet Louise was still deeply moved by it, laughing ‘Ha!’ and sighing weakly. *Waa, I should just enjoy the play like them,* Saito thought.

However… the play still seemed to be no good. He looked around yawning, watching the visitors. There seemed to be some well known faces of society there. However, only young women were intensively gazing at the actors. Guess some things do not change even compared to Saito’s different world.

Saito became sleepy while watching.

Not being able to bear it anymore, he started to snore slightly.

Louise threw an angry look at the sleeping Saito.

Wh-what?! This fellow… even though it is such a special play! I invited him!

For Louise this was a date. This should have been her memorable first date. Therefore she was so picky about such details as meeting, yet this familiar didn’t notice that.

More so, he didn't escort me!

Did not know where the theater was!

I had to buy the tickets!

Furthermore, he shamefully mixed the seats!

Moreover, he fell asleep!

Though she chose him to be her long-awaited first date companion, this familiar was reluctant to be his master's date! Reluctantly he chose to do so! Un-for-gi-va-ble! Louise restrained her feelings that she wanted to shout out and stared at Saito, who had started a journey to dream land.

But… the play was long… and Louise has gotten tired in the course of time too. Then sleepiness took over her and she slowly closed her eyelids.

It was not possible to endure after all and… she leant her head against Saito's shoulder… she started to watch another play in dream land… Louise began to row a boat.

There was another visitor who wasn't looking at the play as well. It was the same middle-aged noble whose seat Saito took by mistake. He was sitting next to a merchant and was having a secret talk with him.

This talk's content… were the things they heard from Tristain generals. The extremely secret Tristain's military was the object of the gossip.

"F-fleet's construction?"

The merchant asked.

"It will take half a year at least."

The noble answered.

There were more whispers throughout the talk… In exchange for such secret information regarding Royal matters, the merchant passed a small bag to the noble. The noble peeked inside and saw it was tightly packed with golden coins.

The merchant whispered,

“However… why contact each other in the theater?”

“What? To have a secret talk among the crowd of people. It is natural to tell a whispering story here. Therefore – a theater. If you would do that in a small room, one would get suspicious that you are plotting something not good.”

“Haha. I am sure that His Highness the Emperor will be greatly interested in lord’s information. He might even give you a medal if you would come above the clouds.”

“This Albion’s person has a cold heart.”

“What, this whole land will be called by this name, sooner or later. Thank you for your cooperation."

After saying this, the merchant tried to stand up. The nobleman stopped him.

“What more?”

“Why don’t you act slowly? Wait till the last minute of the play.”

* * *

The stony floor of Tristain’s Royal palace echoed the sound of boots as a lone young female knight walked. She had shortly-cut blond hair and clear blue eyes. A protective chain hemp garment with sheet metal parts was wrapped around her body, in addition to a robe with a lily coat of arms painted on it.

Yet there was no wand at her lower waist… instead a long, thin sword.

Coming and going, noble's mage bodyguards halted and stared at her surprised,

as it was unusual to see a fencer in the royal palace.

Mages saw a sword at her waist and the chain-mail that she wore, and started whispering among themselves.

“Fuun! Commoner woman!”

“She must have some grand permission to walk in palace dressed up like that… oh dear, different times!”

“Moreover, this woman is a Protestant! Giving a Chevalier's title to such a harmful insect… I feel ashamed for our young majesty!”

Despite the impudent glances and rude comments about her, the young woman kept on walking straight, without sparing a single look at them.

At the end of the passage… she headed towards Henrietta’s office. She was stopped at the door by a magical guard member with a royal crest on his chest, not allowing her to visit her majesty.

“Her Majesty is in the middle of a conference right now. Come again later.”

The mage guard declared coldly, not even trying to hide his contempt for the female knight.

“Please tell her that Agnes came. I have permission to visit Her Majesty anytime.”

The guard scowled then opened the door and disappeared into the office. After that, he came back, granting Agnes permission to enter the room.

As Agnes entered the office, Henrietta was in the middle of conference with Richmon from the High Court of Justice.

What is the High Court of Justice? That’s the organization that rules the administration of justice in the kingdom. Whenever the privileged class disagreed… judgement is brought in. They inspected literature works, operas or plays in theaters, or supervised commoner’s markets and frequently took care of conflicts within the monarchic government prefecture administration.

Henrietta who noticed Agnes, smiled with the edge of her lips, and told Richmon to break off the conference.

“But Your Highness… Raising taxes any further will make resentment among the commoners grow. This will cause disorder. Other countries may use it against us.”

“It’s an emergency. Despite our citizen's poverty…”

“Construction of 50 warships! 20,000 mercenaries! Equipping 15,000 lords army-men! Food to feed officers and men and our allied forces! Where can you get so much money? Building of a scout army and so on, just give it up, please.”

“The overthrow of Albion is now a national priority of Tristain.”

“But Your Majesty, though former Kings of Halkeginia with united forces attacked Albion on countless occasions… they were always defeated. Going into a campaign across the sky has more difficulties than one can imagine.”

Richmon declared, adding a hoity-toity gesture.

“I know. However I also know that the finances minister reported that ‘The procurement of these war expenditures is not impossible.’ Are you dissatisfied that you won’t be able to enjoy your former luxuries? As a matter of fact, I wonder how much you've saved since you started working?”

Henrietta said sarcastically, looking at the gorgeous clothes that Richmon was wearing.

“I myself prohibited imperial guard knights to wear the chain of silver that decorated the cane to show an example to others. There are no nobles, commoners nor royal family members. We are united now, Richmon.”

Henrietta watched Richmon. He bowed his head.

“You got me with this. I know, Your Majesty. However, the council of the High Court of Justice consists of many people and it is not possible that they would agree with this campaign. I would like you to acknowledge it as a reality.”

“We will reach consensus, with the cardinal’s and my own work. I have

confidence that we will be able to persuade the council.”

Richmon watched Henrietta, who declared this with dazzling eyes.

“…Something wrong?”

“No… I just admired.”

“Admired?”

“That’s right. This Richmon, served ten years for Philip the Great, thirty years ago. By the time you were born, I knew more about Your Majesty than Your Majesty yourself.”

“Oh, well.”

“Though you might not remember, the King and Queen were really happy about Your Majesty’s birth! Though it was scary to lift your tiny body in one’s arms, I was still honored to rock and bathe Your Majesty once or twice.”

“My mother said you served well.”

Henrietta said smiling.

“You are too kind. Just a while ago I was giving rude comments not thinking about the mother country.”

“You are a real patriot, I know that very well.”

“Anyway, I’ll say no more. Though Your Highness was such a crybaby before, she became a splendid woman now. There’s nothing for me to regret.”

“I am still… a crybaby. Please lend your power for the mother country, Richmon.”

Richmon bowed, asking for permission to leave the room. Henrietta nodded.

Agnes, who stood next to the door, watched Richmon leave.

Finally Agnes turned to Henrietta, who sat in her chair, and kneeled down, bowing her head.

“Agnes Chevalier de Milan, welcome.”

Looking up, Henrietta urged.

“Did you finish the investigation?”

“Yes.”

Agnes took a letter out of her cleavage and handed it to Henrietta. The Queen took it and looked inside.

This was… Henrietta ordered to this female knight to investigate that ominous night's events. The night where an abductor from Albion… a revived Wales, snuck into the royal palace following someone’s written plan.

“So the guide wasn’t guided alone… as I take.”

“Exactly, he had help getting inside, the bolt was pulled up, and he could go unnoticed into the royal palace as he was alone.”

“To hide, once the group that tried to entice me entered.”

Henrietta said with painful look in her eyes.

“Yes. In only five minutes, Your Majesty.

“Once found out, he insisted that it was a coincidence. However, he could not explain from where he had obtained the money…”

The man whose name was written there, was the one that she gave a position to herself, and assumed him to be faithful, but was bribed by the sum of…

“70,000 écu… This amount of gold is higher than the total amount of his pension.”

“It is as you say.”

Kneeling down, Agnes agreed.

“Though we were able to capture the informant who worked for the money… The number of people going over to Albion’s side has increased recently.”

“That employee…”

“I could not contact him yesterday. Perhaps, he sensed that he was found out.”

Henrietta sighed.

“Snake on one’s chest.”

“Reconquista’s nobles reach and hear beyond the national borders.”

“Might of money. A man with dreams turned into a man with lust for gold. For the money… he tried to sell me and the country.”

Agnes kept silent. Henrietta gently put her hand on her shoulder.

“You did well. Thank you.”

Agnes looked at the crest on her surcoat. Crest… lily, the sign of the Royal family.

“I dedicate myself to Your Majesty. Your Majesty gave me a family name and a position.”

“I cannot trust people that use magic anymore. Except for a few old friends…”

Henrietta said in a sad voice.

“In Tarbes, nobles are similar to military. Therefore, this is what makes you a real noble.”

“You are too kind.”

Henrietta shook her head gently.

“You… had it tough in royal court, Agnes.”

“I was born the way I was born. And no sneers matter.”

“Though you are not noble by birth, you are a noble by soul. Foolish people.”

Agnes muttered a question,

“And what will you do about that man’s case?”

“Not enough evidence. It is hard to prove a crime.”

“Then…” Agnes continued in low voice.

“I am just newly established Queen… I will leave everything to the ‘Musketeer Corps’.”

After commander Wardes' betrayal, War of Tarbes, and the recent annihilation of the Griffon Corps, the magic guard that ought to protect the royalty had crumbled. The Griffon Corps were under the command of the Manticore troops now, thus only one unit was still on duty.

To supplement the lack of guards, Henrietta established the ‘Musketeer Corps,’ led by Agnes. As suggested by its name, the new force used musket and sword, instead of magic. Because of mage shortages, the only members were commoners… For the sake of the personal safety of Henrietta, a woman, the guard consisted only of other women.

Because it interferes with negotiations with other corps when the commander is not an aristocrat, Agnes was awarded a noble title by exception. She became a ‘Chevalier’ and a fictional family name was granted.

Henrietta’s exception made the national military power increase due to the numbers of joining commoners. Although nobles were naturally repulsed by this idea, Henrietta suppressed it. Though it looked like the way they allied Germania, it was actually different. Henrietta, thanks to the kidnapping that deeply damaged her confidence… was unable to trust mages anymore.

“We are the way the royal court says – born without fineness. After all, it is impossible to become a noble.”

Henrietta shook her head.

“Who said that you are not a noble? You are a commander of the corps of the imperial guard knights that I myself admitted. The commander of imperial guards is different, as your position can only be rivaled to that of a field marshal.”

Agnes deeply bowed.

“Have pride. Walk tall. ‘I am an aristocrat’ – tell that to yourself in front of the mirror. If you do so, you will gain the fineness eventually.”

“As you say.”

“You just follow our former plan and watch over the man’s actions. If we are correct, the criminals will surely expose themselves tomorrow.”

“We won’t let them go free?”

“Surely. I won’t forgive anyone who is related to that night’s incident… Countries… People… Anyone. Yes.“

Then Agnes deeply bowed and left the room.

She was eternally grateful to Henrietta. Not because of the position or family name... No, because she was given a chance for revenge.

Chapter 2

Saito was lying on the floor. Towering above him stood a roughly breathing Louise. It was the kitchen of the 'Charming Fairies' Inn. The inn just opened, but it was already noisy inside. Louise, with her arms crossed, looked down at Saito.

“Tell me, big brother.”

Louise still called him big brother. In here, Saito pretended to be Louise’s elder brother. No one believed it as everyone in the inn already knew that Louise was a noble, yet she continued calling him ‘Big Brother’ anyway. She had a really stubborn character.

“What, little sister?”

Saito asked in a voice feeble and strained from Louise’s harsh beating.

“What were you doing before I called you?”

“Cleaning dishes.”

“Don’t lie. You were looking away.”

“A little.”

“Not a little.”

Louise pointed inside of the inn.

“You were ogling that girl’s thighs, this girl’s breasts and that girl’s bottom…”

Then, Louise angrily pointed at Jessica.

“You were watching the valley of Jessica’s breasts too.”

“A little.”

“Hey, big brother...”

Louise stomped on Saito’s face with her feet.

“Yes?”

“Isn’t it bad for you not to look at me? Isn’t your master gathering information from drunkards? If your cute master is endangered, you ought to protect her, right?”

“I'm sorry.”

“Sorry is not enough. You looked at me only twice; I counted. You looked at this girl and at that girl four times. You looked at Jessica’s cleavage twelve times. You looked away, ignoring your Master. I c-c-c-cannot p-p-permit that!”

“Hey, I wasn’t looking!”

Pardon me. I’m seeing Louise every day. Her sleeping face too. It is love. Aah, master is cute. However, I want you to permit me to look at other girls. It is a man's nature. You cannot fight it even if looking away. Therefore, it is not necessary to get angry so much… Saito misunderstood her anger.

But, he would never say such an excuse aloud. By now, Saito had learned how to deal with Louise.

“What if the moment when you look away, I am attacked by a strange man? Do you understand? Are you willing to put me in such danger?"

“No… Wouldn’t that be alright? Ugh!”

“Why?”

“Master is not that appealing really. A tiny body has tiny popularity.”

Saito said what he was thinking. Louise spread her hands, sighed with a ‘Fuuh,’ and started warming-up for another physical exercise.

“Really? I see. The dog can only be taught physically. Nnshotto.”

She went back to her vigorous exercise.

While Louise was warming-up, Saito quietly slipped towards the back door. He had enough punishment a little while ago. Ten minutes. He needed to run away and get some rest.

Saito gripped Derflinger, who was rolled up in a cloth. Due to a recent incident, he was always carrying Derflinger with him. Reluctantly, he decided to carry it around, even though he knew how obstructive it could be.

The moment he opened the back door and stepped out into the alley, he saw a hooded woman running in short steps in his direction.

Don! The woman knocked up against Saito, who just opened the door and fell on the ground. This made Saito flurried.

“S-sorry...Are you all right?”

The woman hid her face with her hood and said in panic,

“…That, is there a 'Charming Fairies' inn somewhere around here?”

“Eh? That’s here…”

Muttering, Saito noticed that woman’s voice sounded familiar. At the same time the woman became aware of the same thing as well. Quietly, she lifted an edge of her hood and stole a quick glance at Saito's face.

“Princess!”

“Shh!” she said, covering his mouth. Henrietta, wrapped in the lobes of gray hood, hid herself behind Saito, to avoid being seen from the Main Street.

“Search there!”

“Maybe she headed to Bourdonne Street!”

From the Main Street the rough voices of soldiers could be heard. Henrietta put the hood back on again.

“…Is there a place where I could hide?”

Henrietta looked so tiny.

“There is an attic here where we live…”

“Please guide me there.”

Saito quietly brought Henrietta to the attic. She sat down on the bed and breathed out deeply.

“…Safe for now.”

“It is not safe. What was that about?”

“I just sneaked away for a minute… and such uproar happened.”

“Huh? Weren’t you kidnapped the other day? No wonder it turned into a fuss!”

Henrietta became silent.

“Princess, aren’t you a ruler now? And you still act so selfishly?”

“That not it. It’s because I have important business… And I heard from reports that Louise is here… I’m glad I could meet you at once.”

“A-anyway, I’ll call Louise.”

Louise after noticing that Henrietta disappeared would surely go ballistic, but this might help to ease her mind a bit. Louise’s behavior was easy to predict. Like always.

“Don’t.”

Henrietta stopped Saito.

“W-why?”

“..I do not want to speak with Louise.”

“What?”

“I do not want to disappoint that girl.”

Saito sat on the chair and stared at Henrietta.

“Then, what else? Sneaking out of the castle without permission is not a good thing to do.”

Then Saito realized.

“But, if you didn’t come here to meet Louise, then what did you come here for?”

“I came to borrow your power.”

“M-me?”

“If it’s all right, I want you to guard me till tomorrow.”

“W-why me? Aren’t you the Queen? You have many soldiers and mages to

guard you...”

“For today and tomorrow, I want to blend in with commoners. And, naturally, I do not want anyone from the palace to know that. So…”

“What?”

“I trust only you.”

“That’s… don’t you have anyone else?”

“Yes. I know you are good, and I, myself, am almost lonely in the palace. Many people there do not like me as a young queen…”

And after a moment of hesitation she added,

“…and as a traitor.”

Saito recalled Wardes. Asking Louise, who was her best friend after all, to travel incognito – there might be something that cannot be spoken even to Louise.

“I see. Only because it is the Princess' request I will do it, but…”

After that Saito watched Henrietta’s face.

“It’s dangerous isn’t it?”

Henrietta veiled her eyes down.

“Yes.”

“Really? Then Princess, do not tell that to Louise about going through danger. Please promise me.”

“All right.”

She nodded.

“Then it is good, but…”

“Then, let's leave. I cannot stay around here forever.”

“Where are we going?”

“We won’t be leaving town. Please calm down. For the time being, I want to change clothes…”

Henrietta looked at the dress under her robe. It was a white, clean and elegant dress, hiding behind the robe would be too noticeable. Even a noble couldn’t complain about this attire.

“These are Louise’s clothes but… She bought them to make her look as a commoner.”

“Please, lend them to me.”

Saito pulled the box from under the bed and took out Louise's clothes. Then Henrietta turned her back to Saito, not worrying about him looking! Saito started to panic once she took off her dress. He accidentally caught a glimpse of Henrietta’s chest from behind. Though it was not as big as Kirche’s, it was still bigger than Siesta’s. After all, she was a queen, so her breasts must be Queen-like as well. But then he realized.

Can she wear Louise’s shirt?

It was just like he thought.

“The shirt… is rather tight.”

Not ‘rather’. The shirt was bought following Louise’s size, and it could not match Henrietta’s breasts. The more she strained, the more buttons flew off.

“Mhm. Very.”

Saito said while holding his nose.

“Mh, good?”

Good! Nothing else one could expect from the queen. Henrietta should not worry about that. “I hope it won’t be too flashy if I do this,” she muttered as she unfastened her top two buttons.

It only emphasized the valley of her breasts - this was as if there were no shirt at all to begin with. Though it might be embarrassing, walking next to a man in such attire. This also made one forget that she was queen and made her look more like a woman.

“Let’s go.” Henrietta urged Saito.

“We cannot go yet.”

“Eh? Really?”

“You should at least change your hairstyle.”

“Then, change it.”

Henrietta is similar to Louise after all, what an inexperienced princess, Saito thought while fiddling with Henrietta's hair. Even changing clothes could not mask that…

He lifted her hair up into a ponytail, the way that he occasionally did for Louise too.

This changed the atmosphere a lot. Then, Saito put some light make-up on Henrietta, using Louise’s cosmetics.

Wouldn’t they need make-up in the inn? Because she said so, Saito bought it… But since Louise did not use it, there was plenty of it left.

“Fufu, this way you look like a town woman.”

With a light make-up and in the front open shirt… She certainly looked like a cheerful town woman.

Because she came forth to the attic, it seemed like they would not inform Louise about anything. Saito felt uneasy for a moment. He guessed he’d have to talk with her later. It couldn’t be helped, as it was the Queen’s wish.

Saito and Henrietta quietly sneaked through the back door to the alley.

The alerted state about the Queen’s disappearance seemed to have increased…

The exit to Chicton was heavily guarded again.

“They placed a cordon.”

Saito reported things that seemed like a police drama in his world. Somehow understanding the meaning, Henrietta nodded.

“What now? Would it be all right not having your face covered?"

“Hiding it would be even more suspicious. Drop your hand over my shoulder.”

Saito held Henrietta’s shoulder as he was told. They approached the place where the guards stood. The tension rose and thier pulse quickened. Henrietta muttered in a hard tone,

“Pretend to lean into me. Like a lover.”

Eh? Giving him no time to think, Henrietta clasped Saito’s hand that he was holding her shoulder with, and led it to the crevice of her open shirt. Feeling Henrietta’s soft and smooth hills of flesh along his finger, Saito panicked.

“Don’t squirm.”

Henrietta drew her mouth next to Saito’s ear and muttered tenderly, with a fake smile on her lips.

Saito passed through the guards doubly nervous.

Though the guard accidentally saw the couple… he had only seen the Queen's face from a distance. Besides even in his wildest dreams he could not imagine the Queen walking with a commoner, allowing his hand to touch her skin in such a way. He turned his eyes away at once and called another woman to stop.

Henrietta, walking out to the Main Street, laughed.

“Princess?”

“No… I'm sorry. Because it was such a funny moment. However, a pleasant one.”

“…Eh?”

“I put on rough clothes, changed my hairstyle… put on only a light make-up and no one could recognize me. “

Certainly… Henrietta seemed to merge with the scenery of this night. Saito felt that she was a different woman.

“However, we were seen by a person who barely knows your face, Princess.”

“Shh!”

“Eh? Eeeh?”

“Don’t call me princess in public. Call me ‘Ann’ in short.”

“Ann, then.”

“Yes.”

Then, Henrietta inclined her head to the side in doubt.

“Tell me your name.”

Being unknown to the Princess, Saito answered sadly.

“Saito.”

“Saito, unusual name.”

At that moment, Henrietta muttered leaning to Saito in a town woman’s way.

“Y-yeah, Ann, it’s unusual.”

“Be more rough.”

“Understood, Ann.”

Smiling, Henrietta entwined her arm around Saito’s.

Because night came slowly, the couple went to a hotel for the time being. It was a plain, cheap lodging house. They were led to a worn-out room on the second floor that made even the attic at “Charming Fairies” inn look heavenly.

The futon of the bed was strangely damp, it was unclear for how many days it had been left to dry, and a small mushroom was growing in the corner of the room. The lamp, even after wiping off the soot, was still really black.

“Well, for so much money, it's not that great a room.”

But Henrietta said while sitting on the bed.

“No, the room is fantastic.”

“Is that so…”

“Yes. Here at least you do not have to worry… about venomous snakes sleeping on your chest.”

“And no weird bugs either.”

“Right.”

Henrietta smiled.

Saito sat on the chair standing in the room. The chair, as if protesting, made a strange, creaky sound. For some reason, he wanted to keep the distance between him and his honorable partner as far as possible. Finding it difficult to keep talking, Saito asked.

“Is it really such a nice room?”

“Yes. It is exciting. Because it has the taste of the imprudent, ordinary life of citizens…”

She emphasized that with a cute gesture. Henrietta acting like that, created a slight feeling of intimacy.

Because the room was pitch dark, they decided to light up the sooted lamp. He could not find any matches, though he looked around carefully.

“They don’t have matches here… I’ll go down and bring them.”

Henrietta shook her head and took out a crystal wand from her bag. She swung it and ‘Posh!’ the lamp's wick lit up.

Henrietta sat gazing at the lamplight, holding her chin with her hand.

Saito, feeling dazzled somehow, turned his eyes away.

Seeing Henrietta relaxed like that… though she still had that sense of intimacy around her, she was still a princess. No, she was a queen now… a very young queen still. The word princess suited her more. Unrivaled grace and dignity. Though it was a similar feeling with Louise… but Louise could be so childish when unhappy, while Henrietta was still calm and composed. She had an aura of a grown up adult around her. Even through the gaps of her shirt one could smell her womanly charm.

This was an indescribable charm of mixed noble pride and danger.

“What now?”

She asked Saito in an innocent voice. Such a princess was really beautiful, thought Saito while mumbling something.

“Is Louise all right?”

Henrietta asked Saito from the other side of the lamp. Mysteriously, Henrietta’s presence made this worn-out place look like a royal palace bedroom. Henrietta had the power to change the surrounding air that way. Even at night time it felt like it was a bright day.

“Yeah. Well, she, that, she said she would accomplish her job for the Princess…”

As for Louise, she always scolded Saito for failing to gather information.

“She is all right from that aspect.”

“Eh?”

“That child has sent me a precise report through the carrier owl every day.”

“Is that so?”

If you think about it, she probably wrote those while Saito was sleeping. What a serious fellow.

"Yes… She exactly informed me every day about every rumor… Every single one. Without a single complaint. She certainly blended with commoners, not worrying when it will end. Because that child is highborn… Thus, I worry if her health is all right.”

“She is all right. She does everything energetically.”

Saito nodded.

“I'm so glad.”

“But, is the information that Louise gathers really useful?”

“Yes. It is useful.”

Henrietta smiled.

“I myself want to hear citizens' real intentions. I want to hear the true opinion about the politics I do. If they inform me directly, they change some things. They would not be comfortable with telling me… as they are with others. I want to know the truth. Even the things I don’t like.”

A sad smile appeared on Henrietta’s face.

“Princess?’

“No… It’s just that knowing the truth is sometimes difficult. Though I am called a ‘Holy Woman’, there are harsher names I heard. I am looked down as a greenhorn trying to attack Albion, abusing her power to organize an invasion army, and I am suspected of being Germania’s puppet… Really, not queen-like...’

“Seriously?”

“Is your world also the same?”

“Eh?”

Saito looked blankly.

“Excuse my impoliteness. I asked the Magic Academy Director Osman. I was surprised to learn that you came from a different world. I could hardly ever imagine that such world existed. So in your world, at war… is the government spoken ill about?”

Saito remembered. Newspapers were flooded with everyday news about the corruption of the politicians at war…

“There is not much difference.”

“It is the same there as well.”

Henrietta muttered, relieved.

“Wars… do you have them?”

“Our country is in the middle of one.”

“No… I mean, besides attacking that flying continent?”

“Why would you say so?”

“A little while ago, you said an invasion army. Did similar invasions happen here, too?”

“Oh well. In that case, this war is endless…These are the things that should be left unsaid. It’s not a thing to talk with you about. Please forget it.”

Still, hearing Saito being silent, Henrietta looked up.

“Do you hate war?”

“I guess I do not love it.”

“But, you saved the kingdom at Tarbes.”

“I did so to defend an important person.”

“Then, that night…”

Henrietta turned her face away and muttered hesitatingly. Then Saito… recalled that ominous night.

The night that Wales, who was thought to be dead, revived and tried to kidnap Henrietta. He remembered seeing his corpse. But he couldn’t recall much.

“I am sorry.”

Henrietta said in a tiny voice.

And then…

It started raining. As small raindrops beat against the window. They could hear people in the streets shouting “Che! Rain!,” “Out of nowhere!”.

Henrietta started to tremble.

“Princess?”

Henrietta muttered in a tiny voice. In a voice that seemed to vanish.

“…can you do something for me?”

“W-what?”

“Hold my shoulders tightly.”

The wand fell from the trembling hand of Henrietta and made a dry sound hitting the floor.

“What's wrong?”

“I’m afraid of rain.”

After those words… Saito remembered that on that night it started to rain as well. Henrietta and the revived Wales used that rain to create… a huge tornado that tried to swallow Saito and the others.

Saito silently sat down next to Henrietta and held her shoulders. Henrietta kept on shaking.

“Princess…”

“Because of me… everyone died… I killed them. I don’t understand. I do not understand. Can I ever be forgiven?”

Saito thought for a while and said.

“No one can forgive that. Indeed…”

“That’s right. I… I have no forgiveness for what I did to you or other people… When I hear the rain, I can only think about such things.”

Henrietta closed her eyes and drew her cheek to Saito’s chest. Her hand firmly gripped Saito’s. At the sound of the rainfall, her shivering grew stronger. She was not a queen, not even a princess… she was just a lonely, weak girl now. A girl who fell in love with a prince from a foreign country. Maybe this person, was weaker than anyone. She cannot do a thing, without someone next to her. Yet she was forced to put on a crown. She was forced to grip the scepter that commands the war.

He thought unhappy thoughts.

Chapter 3

Louise was watching the falling rain and pouting. Where had Saito gone to in the middle of such rain? Louise finished warming-up a while ago and when she turned around to her familiar for some chastisement… Saito was gone.

Although she searched the inn inside out, he was nowhere to be found. At first she thought he had gone back to attic and hid himself there, but it was empty. However… her commoner clothes, that she had bought to blend in, had disappeared as well.

Feeling somewhat uneasy, Louise left the attic. When she returned back to the inn, Scarron and others looked worried.

“No good, rain… Customers will stop coming because of this rain.”

“However, it's quite noisy outside. Did something happen?”

Indeed, as said, one could hear outside the sound of rainfall mixing with the roar of palace guards. Louise opened the door and stepped outside. She approached a soldier with a sword and called him out.

“Hey, what happened?”

The soldier shot a short glance at Louise’s camisole and declared in annoyed voice.

“Eei! Shut up! It is not bar woman’s business! Return back to your inn!”

“Wait.”

Louise still called him to stop and took Henrietta's authorization papers out of her cleavage.

“Though I look like this, I am Her Majesty's court lady.”

Pop-eyed, the soldier looked at Louise, then at her authorization papers, and then back at Louise again, and stood upright.

“F-f-forgive my rudeness!”

“Just speak.”

The soldier in a tiny voice explained to Louise,

“…We finished inspecting Champ de Mars, but when we returned back to the royal palace, Her Majesty had disappeared.”

“Is it Reconquista again?”

“The criminal’s objective is unknown, but he was certainly skillful… Suddenly a mist came out of her carriage…”

“Were you on guarding duty at that time?”

“It was a newly organized corps.”

“I see. Thank you. Do you have a horse?”

The soldier shook his head.

“Useless!”

Louise began running towards the royal palace through the rain. *At a time like this, where the heck has Saito gone to?* She clicked her tongue angrily. *Really, just when you need him the most he is not there!*

Agnes pulled the horse that she was riding on to a stop in front of a certain large residence. It was the Richmon’s residence… here, during the day, she conferred with Henrietta.

It was the corner of an upscale residential area where often lords resided. Agnes looked at a huge and wide two-storied residence and crooked her lips. She knew

painfully well that Richmon lived here for 20 years and used any possible method to build this luxurious mansion.

She knocked against the gate, loudly announcing her visit. The gate window opened and a page stuck out his head.

“Who’s there?”

“Please tell Richmon that Her Majesty’s Musketeer Agnes arrived.”

“At such hour?”

The page said in a suspicious voice.

Indeed, it was around midnight.

“Urgent message. I need to convey it by all means.”

Inclining his head, the page disappeared inside. After a while, he returned and removed the bolt of the gate.

Agnes gave the bridle to the page and headed towards the residence.

After a while, when she passed the living room, she finally saw Richmon sitting at the fireplace, dressed in his nightclothes.

“An urgent message, huh? It better be good to wake me up so abruptly.”

Richmon muttered, not trying to hide his lofty contempt towards Agnes.

“Her Majesty disappeared.”

Pikun! - Richmon’s eyebrows shot up.

“Kidnapped?”

“It’s under investigation.”

Richmon looked doubtful.

“Big incident indeed. However, is it similar to the other day’s kidnap case? Is

Albion involved again?”

“It’s under investigation.”

“That’s not the way guardians should talk! Under investigation! Under investigation! Yet you cannot do a thing. You always bring trouble to the law academy. What units were on duty?”

“Us, musketeers.”

Richmon stared at Agnes unpleasantly.

“It just proves your incompetence as a newly established unit.”

Richmon declared in a voice loaded with sarcasm.

“To clear our name, we are doing the best we can at investigating.”

“That’s why I said! Swords and guns are children toys against magical wands! A whole unit of commoners cannot replace a single mage!”

Agnes watched Richmon quietly.

“Grant the permission of military acts… I would like to get the permission to block highways and ports.”

Richmon rejected the cane. He grabbed a pen that flew towards him through the air, wrote something on a parchment and handed it to Agnes.

“Do your best to find Her Majesty. If you are not able to find her, all members of the Musketeers will be hanged by the war tribunal. Think about it.”

Agnes turned to leave but halted in front of the door.

“What? Is there anything else?”

“Your Excellency…”

In a low, anger filled, stifled voice, Agnes began to squeeze out words.

“What?”

“There is hearsay about the incident you were involved in 20 years ago.”

Hauling the string of memory, Richmon closed his eyes. Twenty years ago… a revolt that shook up the country and he remembered the suppression.

“Aah, so?”

“Your Excellency was involved in the ‘Slaughter of D'Angleterre’.”

“Slaughter? Don’t call it so ill. Weren’t the commoners in distant provinces planning to overthrow the nation? That was a rightful duty of repression. Anyway, it’s mostly a legend.”

Agnes left.

Richmon watched the closed door for a while… Would he be given the pen and the parchment again, he might change his decision, as he felt that a vicious force had been unleashed just now.

Agnes, who left the residence, took the horse from the page. She took out of her saddle bag a black robe and put it over the chain hemp garment, placing the hood over her head. Then she took out two pistols and carefully reloaded them, watching that the gunpowder would not get wet from the rain. Then she checked the fire grate, percussion hammer and shut the gun barrel. It was a new, flint type gun.

Then she placed her sword in a sheath and straddled the horse, finishing up the battle preparations. But then… someone ran out through the rain. The girl could be seen coming from the Chicton Street, who, after noticing Agnes straddling the horse, ran up to the female knight. Because she was running through the rain she looked poorly. Her white camisole was dirty due to mud and barefooted as she had taken off her shoes since they were too uncomfortable to run with.

“Wait! Wait! Please wait!”

Wondering, Agnes turned around.

“Lend me your horse! Hurry!”

“I refuse.”

Saying that Agnes tried to turn her horse away but the girl blocked the way.

“Move aside.”

She said but the girl did not listen. She took out some parchment and pointed it in front of Agnes.

“I am Her Majesty's court lady! I have the authority to use police powers! Your horse is requisitioned in Her Majesty's name! Dismount it at once!”

“Her Majesty's court lady?”

Agnes looked doubtful. The girl looked like a woman from a bar. However, though she was all dirty from running in the rain, her noble features could still be recognized. Agnes hesitated for the moment.

Louise, finally losing her temper because Agnes didn’t dismount her horse, pulled out her wand. Mimicking Louise’s movements, Agnes pulled out her pistol at once.

Two people went still aiming wand and gun at each other.

Louise said in a trembling low voice.

“…Though I am still not well accustomed to my magic. Nontheless, it is still more powerful. Give up.”

Agnes replied, with her finger on pistol’s percussion hammer.

“…from such distance, a pistol will be more accurate.”

Silence settled over.

“Introduce yourself. You have a wand, thus you must be a noble.”

Agnes said.

“Court lady, directly accountable to Her Majesty, de La Vallière.”

La Vallière? That was a familiar name. In the conversations with Henrietta, she heard that name on countless occasions.

“Then, you…”

Agnes withdrew the gun. This trembling girl with her wand set up… is rumored to be Her Majesty’s best friend. This young girl with disheveled pink hair…

“You know me?”

Louise, with a blank expression on her face, put down her wand as well.

“I often heard about you. I am very honored to meet you at last. You can share a horse with me. Let me explain the circumstances for you. If you were shot, it would cause Her Majesty to hold a grudge.”

Agnes stretched forth her hands to Louise. Agnes easily pulled up Louise with a strength that was hard to imagine for such a delicate woman to posses.

“Who are you?”

Louise straddled behind Agnes.

“Her Majesty's musketeer. Commander Agnes.”

This made Louise, who heard about the ‘Musketeers’ from the soldier before, enrage.

“What on earth were you doing?! Were you sleeping while forgetting your guard?! Her Majesty was shamelessly kidnapped!”

“As I said, let me explain the situation. Anyway, Her Majesty is safe.”

“Whaat?!”

Agnes spurred on the horse and it started to run. With the rain falling hard the two people disappeared within the darkness of the night.

On the bed of the cheap lodging house, Henrietta was sitting with her eyes tightly shut and Saito's arms around her, trembling. Saito couldn't find words… so he just sat and held Henrietta's shoulders.

When the rain finally changed into drizzle, Henrietta calmed down a little and forced a smile.

"I am sorry."

"No…"

"I brought you to this useless place. Yet, I was helped by you again in the end."

"Again?"

"It is so. On that night, I… I could not think straight, I was manipulated and tried to leave with Wales… You stopped me…"

"Yeah."

"You said at that time. 'If you go I will cut you. I cannot permit you to lie to yourself even if you are madly in love', you said."

"I s-said so."

Embarrassed, Saito turned down his face.

"Still, the foolish me did not awake. I tried to kill you. However, you stopped the foolish tornado that I myself unleashed."

Henrietta closed her eyes.

"By the way, at that time… I felt relieved."

"Relieved?"

"That's right. Even I noticed that it wasn't the same Wales whom I loved. The truth was different. I... in the bottom of my heart, wanted for someone to say those words and stop the foolish me."

Taking a deep, as if painful, breath, Henrietta continued to talk. In a withdrawn voice.

“Therefore, I ask you, Familiar-san. If I were to do something foolish again… if I were instigated again… Would you stop me with your sword?”

“Why?”

“At that time, I was ready to kill, not holding back. Even though I was asked by Louise, that gentle child, I could not stop. Therefore…”

Saito said in a surprised voice.

“I can’t do it! Really… you can’t be weak. You are the queen. Everyone obeys your will. Don’t talk like this, Princess. You would not be alive after all this if you were not brave. Was that all a lie?”

Henrietta looked down.

Then…

Don, don, don!

Someone battered against the door.

“Open up! Open the door! It is royal police! We are searching for run away criminals hiding in this inn! Open up now!”

Saito and Henrietta looked at each other.

“They do not seem to be searching for me.”

“…Let them go away. Stay silent.”

Henrietta nodded in agreement…

Meanwhile, the knob began to turn. However… it was not possible to open because of the lock. Clank-clank! The knob shook violently.

"Open up now! It’s an emergency! Or I will break it!”

Bam! One could hear the sounds of sword against the door knob, trying to open it.

“Not good.”

Henrietta, with determined face, unfastened the buttons of her shirt.

“Princess?”

His surprised voice was cut short as Henrietta captured Saito’s lips with her own. The kiss was sudden and intense. Locking her arms around Saito’s neck, Henrietta pushed him down to the bed. Seemingly undisturbed, Henrietta had her eyes closed and with a deep sigh, pushed her tongue into Saito’s mouth. It could take one’s consciousness away, so intense was the kiss.

Simultaneously with Henrietta pushing Saito down to the bed, the soldier, who was trying to break the door knob, kicked the door open.

What the pair of soldiers saw… was a young woman, lying on top of a man, intensely kissing his lips. The woman did not pay any attention to the soldiers and kept on going crazy. Sighs of affection were escaping from the opening of the pair of lips. The soldiers watched the spectacle for a while… then one murmured to the other.

“…T-they seem to be just sheltering from the rain, and enjoying it a lot.”

“Damn, lets finish up checking the others.”

Thud! The door was closed and they disappeared down the stairs. Since the doorknob was broken, the door opened up, slightly squeaking.

Henrietta separated herself from his lips… but, even though the soldiers were already outside the hotel, she still kept on watching Saito with moist eyes.

Saito was completely surprised by Henrietta’s behavior at that moment. When the time comes, she could sacrifice her own body, like tonight, just to keep the secret. She was really strong.

With flushing cheeks, Henrietta kept quietly watching Saito.

“…Princess.”

Henrietta said in a strained voice.

“I already told you to call me Ann.”

“But…”

Not waiting for him to finish, she pressed her lips against his again. This time, it was a gentle… emotional kiss. In the dingy lamplight… he could see Henrietta’s white shoulders that he held just a while ago.

With Saito strongly confused, Henrietta’s lips started to trace the shape of his face.

“Do you have… a lover?”

In a hot voice Henrietta whispered into his ear. He felt like melting from that sound. Then, Louise’s face popped up in Saito’s head. Louise was not his lover. But…

“I don’t, however…”

Henrietta started to nibble Saito’s earlobe.

“Then, treat me as your lover.”

“W-what?!”

“It’s all right, only for tonight. I am not telling you to be my lover. But, please, hug me… and kiss me.”

That moment - time stopped… this way, a few minutes passed.

Moisture filled the room thanks to the rain. The mixed smell of futon and bodies drifted in the air.

Saito watched Henrietta's eyes. Even in such a dirty room… Henrietta’s beautiful face was dazzling. No, maybe it dazzled because of this dirty room.

He was almost inadvertently drowned in these charms. But… he could not go

beyond Henrietta’s kiss… Louise would never forgive Saito. Not only would she never forgive him but also she would be saddened, because Louise respected Henrietta the most.

He could not do such a thing.

He could not pretend to be lovers and kiss with a person… that his important person held important. Henrietta was just lonely. There must be another way to comfort her.

Therefore, Saito lightly patted Henrietta's chestnut hair.

“I cannot become a prince.”

“I’m not asking to do such thing.”

“Remember? I am not a person from this world, I am from a different world. I can't… substitute someone.”

Henrietta closed her eyes and drew her cheek to Saito's chest.

After that… when the heat gradually vanished… Henrietta muttered, embarrassed.

“…You must think I am a shameless woman. Even though I am called a queen… I am still a woman. And at night I still miss someone’s warmth. "

For a while…, Henrietta didn't say a word and just laid there, pressing her cheek against Saito's chest. Inside a cheap lodging house, that might be the cheapest in town, the noblest woman of the country trembled like a child in his arms. Saito smiled wryly at this somewhat absurd situation.

And… felt uneasy.

“Princess.”

“What?”

“Please explain to me slowly. What on earth are we doing here? Secrets… everyone looking hard for you. And… you are trying so hard to hide yourself. It

cannot be just one of those capricious things, right?”

“…Oh well. I guess I need to tell the full story.”

Henrietta voice regained her usual dignity.

“It’s a fox hunt.”

“Fox hunt?”

“Yes, you know that clever animal, the fox? Even with dogs at it, even with beaters, it is not easy to capture one’s tail. Therefore… I set a trap.”

“Trap?”

“Yes, and the bait is me. Come tomorrow… the fox will leave its nesting hole.”

Saito looked at her.

“And who is the fox?”

“Albion’s spy.”

Agnes and Louise were riding the horse down the alley leading to Richmon’s mansion. Though the rain eventually turned into drizzle… it was still cold. Agnes gave Louise her own mantle to wear.

“W-what are the circumstances?”

“Rat hunt.”

“Rat hunt?”

“Yeah, they not only damage a kingdom's granary… but also try to betray the master in the middle of the hunt.”

Uncomprehending, Louise stared at her

“Explain it in full detail.”

“There is no time to explain it any further now. Nha! We arrived.”

The gate of Richmon's residence opened and a young page appeared before Agnes’s horse. It was a 12 or 13 year old boy with red cheeks. Holding a torch, he looked around restlessly before starting to lead his horse again. The page started to gallop while holding a torch. Agnes smiled thinly and began to chase after the horse, following the light of the torch.

“…What’s going on?”

“It has started.”

Agnes answered briefly.

In the night air, the page continued galloping the horse at full speed. Seems he was told beforehand by his master to hurry. The boy was surveying his surroundings while desperately clinging to the horse's back.

Agnes, keeping a distance between them, followed him.

The page's horse passed the upscale residential area and stopped at a suspicious district. In the surroundings of the night, one could hear the Queen's search party drinking and having fun.

Omitting going through Chicton Street, the horse disappeared into a secluded alley.

When he disappeared at the entrance of the alley, Agnes descended from the horse and looked into the alley.

Leaving the horse at the stables, Agnes turned to the hotel once she made sure that the page entered there. Jumping off the horse, Louise asked while running after her.

“What, what is happening?”

Agnes did not answer any more.

She entered the hotel and elbowed her way through the mass of people at the bar in the front till she saw the page going up to the second floor. She followed.

From the staircase, Agnes confirmed the door through which the page had entered.

Two people had expected visitors for a while there.

Agnes whispered to Louise.

“Take off the mantle. Start leaning over me in a bar woman's way.”

Not understanding, Louise did as Agnes said and took off her mantle. Then she pretended to be a fizgig flirting with the knight. She saw such scenes often during the hustle at the bar and had them imprinted in her mind.

“Good.”

Agnes said to Louise without averting her glance from the second floor. Though her voice was still womanly, when keeping silent she left an impression of an honorable knight, probably because of her short hair. Louise’s cheeks started to blush inadvertently.

The page walked out of the room at once.

Then Agnes drew Louise to her. Ah, and snatched a kiss.

Though Louise tried to wriggle out in rage, Agnes suppressed her with strong power, and she could not move...

The page gave a short glance at Agnes and Louise kissing, and turned his eyes away at once.

A kiss between a knight and a bar woman. Just like in the painting that hangs on the wall of the residence, an ordinary spectacle.

Then the page went out through the exit, straddled a horse just like the time he came here, and disappeared into the town of the night.

Agnes finally let Louise free.

“W-what are you doing?!”

Louise shouted, blushing. If her partner were a man, she would have pulled out her wand and blown up this place already.

“Relax. I do not have such a hobby. This is duty.”

“Neither do I!”

Then Louise recalled the page who left.

“You won’t follow him?”

“It does not matter anymore. That boy doesn't know anything at all. His role was only carrying the letter.”

Agnes, not making a sound with her footsteps, silently approached the front of the door in the guest room that the page entered. Louise asked whispering.

“…You aren’t a mage, right? You can’t blow this door off.”

“…you still can break it with enough strength.”

“…it is surely locked. There is nothing you can do. With all that rattle he might run away.”

Louise pulled out the wand that was attached to her thigh, took a deep breath, and muttered the spell of 'Void', aiming the wand at the door. 'Explosion'… the door exploded and was blown off into the room. In no time, Agnes pulled out a sword and jumped inside.

A merchant was there, standing near the bed with a surprised expression on his face. He was holding a wand in one hand. A mage.

The man seemed to be a considerably good magic user, as he quickly pointed his wand at Agnes, who had jumped in, and muttered a spell. A mass of air blew Agnes away. When he uttered another spell and threw Agnes into the wall… Louise entered.

Louise's explosion hit him. The explosion hit straight in front of him, the man

fell on the ground holding his face.

Agnes stood up and hit the wand out of the man’s hands with her sword. Louise picked up the wand that lay on the floor.

Agnes pointed at the man's throat with the tip of her sword. It was a middle aged man. Though he looked like a merchant, the light in his eyes was different. He probably was an aristocrat.

“Do not move!”

Still pointing her sword, Agnes pulled out handcuffs from her waist and locked the iron circles on the man’s wrists. Then put a gag of torn sheet in his mouth.

What is happening at this time of night? – Visitors of the hotel started gathering and looking into the room.

“Do not make any noise! Just arresting a sneaky thief! ”

The scared hotel people withdrew their faces.

A letter that page gave to the man must be somewhere inside, Agnes thought. With a smile on her lips she rummaged through the man’s desk drawers. She found lots of letters and documents and began to slowly read them one by one.

“Who is this man?”

“Albion’s rat. He pretended to be a merchant and lurked in Tristania, gathering information for Albion.”

“Then, this fellow… is an enemy spy. Isn’t it great?! We caught him!”

“It is not finished yet.”

“Why?”

“The parent rats still remain.”

Then Agnes found one sheet of paper, she gazed at it quietly. That was the rough sketch in the building. Notes written in some places.

“So that’s how it is… you damned ones must have planned to contact in the theater, right? This letter arrived some time ago, saying to meet at the same place as usual tomorrow. As it looks from this rough sketch, the place must be a theater, huh? I am sure of it.”

The man did not answer. He became silent and quietly looked the other way.

“Answer me… Noble’s pride.”

With a cold smile on her lips, Agnes pinned the man's foot to the floor with her sword. With the mouth gag still on, the man writhed in agony.

Agnes pulled out a pistol from her belt and pointed it at his face.

“I’ll count to two. Choose. Pride or life.”

The man’s brow started to sweat. Gachink… The sound of Agnes lifting the percussion hammer echoed in the room.

Chapter 4

Dawn was breaking, morning. Central plaza, Saint Rémy's temple of Confucius rang the bell. 11 o'clock.

A single carriage stopped in front of Royal Tanaijiiru Theater. Richmon stepped out from it. He looked up at the theatre proudly. The page who sat on the driver's box, tried to come down and follow him.

“It’s all right. Wait with the carriage.”

Richmon shook his head and entered into the theater. The ticket salesman bowed once he noticed the noble. Not buying a ticket, Richmon went forward. Because play inspection was one of his duties as a censorship director, this place was like his personal villa.

The theater visitors, who were only young women, had started to arrive six minutes ago. At first it was a popular show, but because of the horrible acting it received harsh reviews by the critics. It was likely they had lost business as a result.

Richmon sat down in his private seat and quietly waited for the curtain to rise.

Agnes and Louise had arrived at the front of the theater just a while ago. Louise could not understand why they had to stalk in the alley near the theater all this time. Only when a certain carriage showed up did Agnes let them leave their hideout.

Louise was tired and spent. She hadn’t slept last night. Besides, Agnes did not explain a thing. She said it was a rat hunt, all right, but whenever she asked who the rat was… Agnes became silent and stopped talking.

Before Louise’s eyes, who was patiently waiting in front of a theater, dearly known figures passed.

It was Henrietta escorted by Saito, who had bags under his eyes from lack of sleep. Though Henrietta put on a robe and commoner clothes, those Louise had bought earlier, and wore her hair in a town-woman’s way... Louise was certain she was not mistaken.

Agnes spotted the two people earlier as she had sent a report with the mail owl and kept her eyes open for them coming.

“…Princess. Saito!”

What started as a small mutter turned into a loud yell as she ran up to the pair.

“Louise…”

Henrietta embraced her tiny body closely.

“I was so worried! Where had you disappeared to?”

“I borrowed gentle Familiar–san…and hid myself in town. Forgive me for not telling you. I did not want to drag you into this. So, when I was informed this morning by Agnes that you were acting together, I was surprised. Yet, you are my best friend, so I guess we were destined to run into each other sooner or later.”

Then, Agnes who stood silently nearby, knelt down.

“Everything is ready, waiting for your orders.”

“Thank you. You really did well.”

And the last spectators that arrived in front of the theater…

Were the Manticore Corps, Mage Guards.

Everyone watched surprised as their commander, who had a fantasy beast with a lion's head and snake's body on his coat of arms, approached in an angry manner.

“Hey! What’s the big idea, Agnes-dono?! I came here flying after receiving your

letter, but Her Majesty is not here!”

Then, the commander of Manticore noticed Henrietta and ran up to her in panic.

“Your Majesty! We were worried! Where were you? We were searching for you all night!”

On the verge of tears, commander raised his voice.

What was with these magic guard units? Spectators started to gather, wondering. Because of such an uproar, Henrietta pulled down the hood of her robe again.

"I am sorry for causing anxiety. I will explain later. For now, Commander, just follow my orders.”

“What are they?”

“With the corps under your command, please encircle Royal Tanaijiiru Theater. Do not let even a single ant out.”

The commander, though he had a suspicious expression on his face, bowed at once.

“As you wish.”

“Then, I’ll go in.”

“I’ll follow.”

Louise shouted. However, Henrietta shook her head.

“No, you must wait here. This is something I should finish myself.”

“But-“

“It’s an order.”

Hearing such decisive words, Louise bowed with poor grace.

Henrietta, alone, disappeared into the theater. Agnes, having some other secret things to do, mounted her horse and rode off somewhere.

So… only two people, Saito and Louise, were left.

Louise pulled Saito’s sleeve, who watched Henrietta leave with a blush on his cheeks.

“Hey.”

“What?”

“What, what happened?”

“I was told this is a fox hunt.”

“I heard it was a rat hunt.”

“It’s the same, anyway.”

After that, they both stared blankly at each other.

“Somewhat, it is a duty…”

“Yeah.”

“Guess we both were just supporting role fillers.”

Saito nodded.

Louise noticed a certain smell and brought her nose close to Saito's body.

“Wh-what-”

With a dangerous expression on her face, *sniff sniff* Louise started sniffing Saito’s body smell with her nose.

“H-hey, what the-“

“This smell… It’s the smell of the Princess' perfume!”

“Eh?”

Saito was startled.

“You… you didn’t do anything strange to the Princess right?"

Louse stared at Saito menacingly. Saito turned pale. Surely… he could not tell her about the kiss. He could not betray Henrietta. For the honor of the Princess, he must not tell this. Besides, even if he told, Louise would not believe him anyways.

“Idiot! I didn't do anything!”

“Really?”

Louise kept staring at Saito.

“It must have attached from the escort a while ago.”

Louise grabbed Saito’s ear and pulled him closer. Then she buried her nose in the scruff of his neck.

“Sniff, sniff. Sniff, sniff. Then why does it smell in such place? Why there is perfume on the scruff of your neck just from being an escort? Hmm? What kind of perfume is that?!”

“No, that… that must be from turning in bed while sleeping. Faces must have gotten close. Nothing else.”

“It’s all right. I’ll hear everything from your body!”

Louise, still holding Saito’s ear, dragged him into the side alley.

Saito’s scream echoed in the empty lane.

The curtains rose… the play started.

Because the play was for women, the spectators were only young females. Surrounded by loud cheers, on the stage, gorgeously dressed actors started to play a story of sad love.

It was the play that Louise saw before… ‘Tristania's Holiday.’

Richmon puckered up his brows. But it wasn’t because of the actors laughter or posing, not because of impudent and jarring cheers of young women. It was because an expected visitor did not show up at a promised time.

In his head, various questions turned round and round.

Was the queen’s disappearance an Albion plot that I was not informed of? If so, what is the reason? If not, then maybe a third power exists inside Tristania that he was not aware of? Either way, it was troublesome - Richmon muttered to himself.

Then… a spectator sat next to him. Was it the expected visitor? He threw a side glance. That wasn’t him. It was a young woman with a hood on her head.

Richmon whispered.

“Excuse me. This seat is already taken. Please sit in another place.”

However, the woman did not try to stand up.

This young woman… With an angry expression Richmon turned to face her.

“Haven’t you heard me, Mademoiselle?”

“Spectators should watch the play, Richmon-dono.”

Richmon’s eyes popped out once he recognized the hooded face. It was a person he was sure had disappeared… Henrietta.

Henrietta, looking straight at the stage, asked Richmon.

“This is the play for women. Are they having fun watching it?"

Richmon settled down, regained his composure and leaned back into the seat.

“I am looking over such a trivial play only because of work. Anyways, Your Majesty, there is a rumor that you have hidden yourself…Is it for safety reasons?”

“Indeed. I am discreet with my contacts. It’s a good place to secretly meet with my mistress, right?"

Richmon laughed. Yet, Henrietta did not laugh. She squinted like a hunter.

“If one can get everything, it is useless to wait. I was standing in the ticket line. You went watching a play without buying a ticket, such an act is a violation of the law. I would like a royal palace judge to follow the law.”

“Ho! When did ticket sales became the royal family's jurisdiction?”

Henrietta sighed, breaking the string of the tension.

“Now, let's stop with this nonsense. The secret messenger of Albion, whom you came to contact today, was arrested last night. He talked about everything. Right now he is in Chernobog Prison.“

Henrietta drove Richmon into a corner.

However, as if knowing everything would turn out this way, Richmon didn't loose his composure. He smiled broadly in a fearless manner.

“Hoho! My relation is well hidden, you can’t beat this strategy of mine!”

“That’s right, royal palace judge.”

“I won’t dance on Your Majesty’s palms!”

“I really did not want it to turn out… this way.”

Richmon never showed a malice behind his smile. He never showed a bad attitude, Henrietta remembered in a sore displeasure.

“Because of my disappearance, you decided to come into contact with the secret messenger. ‘The Queen was enticed by hands, other than ours.’ For you this was nothing more than just an affair. You are calm and did not panic. A careful fox, that doesn’t show his tail…”

“Well, since when did you start suspecting?”

“I was not sure. Besides you, there were many suspects. However, the person

who was to inform about my disappearance that night, must have been the criminal. And that person was you.”

Henrietta continued in a sad, tired voice.

“I did not want to believe. You were such… Royal Palace Judge, who should defend the authority and the fineness of the kingdom, assisted a plot of such treason. During my childhood you were always the one who cherished me… and now sold me to the enemy.”

“Your Majesty, for me you are still a girl who doesn't know a thing. Being ruled by Albion is still better than by an ignorant girl on the throne.”

“Was your love for me a lie? You looked like such a gentle person. Was it a lie too?”

“Affability for lord’s daughter does not descend to vassal. You can’t understand that. Because you are such a child, that’s why I did it.”

Henrietta shut her eyes. *Whom should I believe? Why it is so hard to be betrayed by a person whom you trusted? No… I was not betrayed. This man cheated me only for the sake of his career. I cannot understand such a thing, maybe I am, as Richmon says, still a child.*

But, I cannot be a child any longer.

I should gain… eyes that see the truth.

To see the truth despite the heart.

Henrietta said in a decisive tone.

“In the name of the Queen, you are stripped of the title, Royal Palace Judge. Surrender yourself quietly.”

Richmon didn't move at all. Moreover, he pointed to the stage and declared in a tone as if Henrietta was a little idiot.

“Do not say such an inelegant thing. Let the play continue. It just started. Leaving before the play is over is an impoliteness towards the actors.”

Henrietta shook her head.

“At this moment, outside, the Magic Guard has encircled the building. Now, show the nobles' bravery and hand me your cane.”

“Really… such an inexperienced lass… Whom do you think you are arresting?”

“What are you saying?”

“I am only saying that you are 100 years too early to set a trap on me, that’s all.”

"Pon" Richmon clapped.

Then, actors who had been performing the play up till now…, about six men and women, pulled out their wands hidden in their trousers or jackets, and aimed them at Henrietta.

Young women started causing an uproar.

"Silence! Watch the play silently!”

The angry voice of Richmon… revealing his true nature, resounded within the theater.

“Anyone who makes a noise will be killed. This is not a play.”

Suddenly, the whole building was wrapped up in silence.

“You were really unlucky coming here, Your Majesty.”

Henrietta… muttered quietly.

“The actors… were your partners.”

“Yes. This is not a bluff. They are first class casters.”

“And terrible actors, it seems.”

Richmon clasped Henrietta's hand. Henrietta got goosebumps from his repulsive touch.

“My scenario is far reaching. Your majesty, I am going to take you as a hostage. Then, I’ll arrange a ship to Albion. Your persona will be my emigration gift to Albion. The end.”

“Indeed. This play’s scenario is yours. The stage is Tristain and the actor is Albion…”

“And you’ll be the heroine. So, take part in this comedy.”

“Unfortunately, only tragedy suits my taste. I can’t take part in such a monkey show.”

“Sadly, in this life, no one acts against my scenario.”

Henrietta shook her head. Her eyes shone with confidence.

“No, today’s play scenario belongs to me.”

“Your management is bad. Sadly, as a chairman, I can’t allow you to destroy the play.”

Henrietta, not losing her composure… pointed her wand towards the mages, impersonating actors.

“The bad ones are the actors. They are ham actors. One cannot help but notice.”

“Don’t say such extravagant things. Sooner or later they will be celebrated actors in Albion."

“Now, leave the stage.”

Up till now, noisy and frightened women….

After Henrietta’s words, they changed their looks completely and pulled out their guns at the same time

Richmon’s subordinate mages, who were pointing wands at Henrietta, surprised by the spectacle, delayed their movements.

Doon! Sounds of tens of gun shots melted into one big sound.

Because inside of the theater the sound was multiplied, it felt like a thunderous roar.

When the dark, thick smoke cleared up… The Albion mages who were impersonating actors were riddled with bullets, all of them were killed on the stage before casting a single spell.

All theater spectators… were members of the musketeers. Naturally, even the suspicious Richmon could not see this through.

All the musketeers were young commoners… moreover – women.

Henrietta informed her neighbor spectator in an icy tone,

“Please stand up, Richmon. The play is over.”

Richmon stood up with much effort.

He laughed loudly and pulled out the dagger at the same time.

Continuing to laugh loudly like a madman, not afraid of the swords pointed at him, Richmon went up to the stage slowly. The musketeers surrounded him. They were prepared to skewer him if he were to make even one suspicious movement.

“Know when to give up! Richmon!”

“I am glad with the success! Cannot become a splendid scenario written by Her Majesty! So much for my play scenario…”

Richmon watched the surrounding musketeers in a hoity-toity way.

“Your Majesty… The last advice from someone who served Your Majesty since the day of your birth.”

“Speak.”

“Though it started a long time ago, Your Majesty…”

When Richmon stood up in the corner of the stage… and *Don* hit the floor with his foot. Then, just like a pitfall, the floor opened.

“It ends up short here.”

Richmon fell straight through it. Though the musketeers ran up hastily …the floor shut and did not open though they pushed or pulled. Apparently, it was controlled by magic.

“Your Majesty…”

All members watched Henrietta anxiously. Mortified, after biting her fingernails, Henrietta looked up and bellowed,

“Search for him at the front gates! Move it!”

The hole led to an underground passageway. Richmon made this loophole for a rainy day.

To stop from falling Richmon used ‘Levitation’ and, putting a light spell on his wand, began to walk through the underground passageway while illuminating the ground under his feet. The passage ran to Richmon's residence. He needed to return there. He was going to escape to Albion after collecting his money.

“However… the one that led to this was the Princess…”

On the day of his escape, he was going to apply to Cromwell for one troop regiment. Then he’d return to Tristain again, catch Henrietta, and after repaying her for today’s humiliation many times over, he’d rape and kill her.

While walking and imagining such things… he saw a shadow in the light.

A moment passed.

The face that surfaced from the darkness was… the face of Agnes, the

musketeer.

“Oh my, it’s Richmon-dono. Taking another way home?”

Agnes said with a smile. Her voice echoed in the narrow, gloomy and damp passage.

“You…”

Smiling in relief, Richmon answered. Indeed, they might have found out about this secret passage and might have seen his theater plans… but this was not a mage, just a fencer who ambushed him, this should not be hard. He, like most mages, looked down on fencers.

“Move out of the way. There is no time to play with you. It’s too bothersome to kill you in a place like this.”

After Richmon’s words, Agnes pulled out her pistol.

“Checkmate. I have already uttered an incantation. I’ll only have to release it on you. Bullets can’t get past my twenty layer mail. Your obligation to Henrietta doesn’t include giving your life. Because you are a commoner.”

Richmon continued talking in a bored tone.

“An insect's pay is not worth going against a noble’s spell. Leave.”

Agnes squeezed out the words.

“I will kill you not out of loyalty to Her Majesty, but for my personal revenge.”

“Personal revenge?”

“D'Angleterre (Angle province).”

Richmon smiled. *Come to think of it, the other day, before leaving my residence… this fellow asked me about it.* That was why, Richmon, finally understanding the reason, laughed.

“I see! So you are that village’s survivor!”

“You were responsible for that crime… my hometown was destroyed without even knowing why.”

Agnes declared, biting her lip. A stream of blood ran down her lips.

“Romalia’s heresy, ‘Protestant Hunt’. You claimed ‘Protestantism’ was a rebellion and crushed my town. How much did you earn from Romalia’s religion agency in return, Richmon?”

The edges of Richmon’s lips turned up.

“Amount of money you ask? You want to know? I’d like to tell, but I cannot remember the sum of the bribe.”

“Is money all you believe in? Miserable man.”

“The way you trust in god, I trust in my money, is there any difference? The way you regret about relatives that passed away, I yearn for money, is there any difference? Tell me. I would like to know.”

“I’ll kill you. Spend your savings in hell.”

“Though it is wasteful to use a noble’s spell on the likes like you… this is fate.”

Richmon muttered releasing the spell.

A huge ball of fire appeared on the tip of the wand and flew towards Agnes.

He expected for Agnes to shoot the pistol that she was gripping in her hand… yet, she threw it away.

“What?”

She covered herself with the mantle and received the fireball. Though the mantle blazed up in a moment… the water bag beneath it evaporated absorbing the impact of the fireball. However, it did not disappear completely. It knocked against Agnes body, incandescing her chain hemp garment,

“Uwaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!”

However, Agnes endured it not falling down. Fearsome willpower. Enduring the pain of having all her body burned, pulling out her sword, she rushed towards Richmon.

Richmon, in haste, shot another spell trying to counterattack. The blade of wind attacked Agnes. Though it tore through the chain hemp garment and sheet metal armor, it prevented her from suffering a mortal wound. While receiving innumerable cuts on her body, Agnes still rushed on.

The moment when Richmon tried to recite another spell, Agnes crashed into his chest.

“Uoo…”

It was not the spell that escaped Richmon’s mouth…but red blood. Agnes pushed her handle plunging the sword deeper into Richmon’s chest.

“M…mage to a commoner… a noble like me… to a fencer like you…”

“…tell me, are a sword and gun still toys for you?”

While having her whole body burnt and cut, Agnes twisted the sword slowly scooping Richmon's chest out.

“They are not toys. They are weapons. Unlike you nobles, we have at least polished fangs. Die from those fangs, Richmon.”

Gop Richmon vomited an especially large amount of blood.

And slowly crumbled down.

Silence returned to the vicinity.

Agnes picked up the lantern that she dropped earlier, and, supporting her shoulder with the wall, staggeringly started to walk. The cuts on top of burns hurt so much that Agnes could fall down at any moment.

Still, Agnes walked.

“…Cannot die here. Still, still…I need to kill.”

Slowly, step by step, using her sword as a cane, and still bleeding, Agnes headed towards the exit.

The nearest exit of the secret passage going under Tristania’s soil was… the drainage trench on the Chicton Street. As Agnes crept out of there, pulling her body through, townspeople started to scream. Looking up at the dazzling sun… feeling lucky to be alive, Agnes fainted.

Three days later…

In the kitchen, Saito was washing plates as usual. *Don* Louise bumped against his back. Almost dropping the plate, Saito complained,

“Be more careful! Don’t make me break the plates!”

Grrr, Louise glared at him. Feeling relieved, Saito turned his head. Since that day… Louise hadn’t talked to him.

Louise criticized him, as eventually Saito told her everything that happened while hiding with Henrietta in that cheap lodging house. Except one thing… the kiss.

She was only pouting now, but she would get really serious if she were to find out about the kiss. Anyhow, Louise’s desire to monopolize was very strong. She raged whenever her familiar Saito got distracted by other girls; the kiss with her highly valued Henrietta would be even worse.

She would kill him if she knew.

Consequently, no matter what, Saito had to make sure she didn't find out.

“…D-don’t be so angry.”

“I am not angry.”

“So why are you not talking? The Princess and I embraced each other because we had no choice. We didn’t want to be found out…”

“…You didn’t do anything else?”

“O-of course not!”

Saito started to whistle while washing the plates.

Although from the outside it looked like a quarrel between lovers… they both thought otherwise. Saito viewed Louise’s jealousy as a desire to monopolize her familiar. And Louise being Louise did not admit her feelings to herself. So altogether, both their relationships were still going in parallel lines. Would things continue to remain the same? For now, they were parallel lines.

Then, in the place where two people’s relationships were complicated as usual, the door opened and two visitors showed up. They were wearing hoods.

“Hello. Can I help you?”

When Louise went to take an order, one of the guests quietly lifted the hood and showed their face to Louise.

“Agnes!”

Agnes whispered to Louise.

“Please prepare the room on the second floor.”

“If it’s you, then… the other…”

“…is me.”

Henrietta’s voice.

Louise nodded and prepared the guest room on the second floor.

“Now then… Louise. First of all, let me express my gratitude to you...”

Henrietta said looking at everyone who sat around the table.

Louise, Saito, Agnes…

Though Agnes was badly injured, with Henrietta’s, who was a water user, “Recovery” spell help, she was almost completely healed. However, she still couldn’t wear armor. Therefore, today she was wearing a padded undershirt and plain trousers with boots.

“The information that you collected is really useful.”

“I-is it really useful for you?”

It wasn’t only political topics that the town’s gossips were about. It was also citizen’s opinions and criticisms. Even though she couldn’t think all of them through, they were useful for Henrietta…

“This way I can see without pretending myself how I really look to others. I want to hear the true words. Even if they are painful for the ear…”

Anyway, there are a lot of criticisms regarding Henrietta. Though Louise did not agree, she reported everything as it was. That’s why she was glad.

“I am still a greenhorn, thus I should accept the criticism, because it is necessary for future improvement.”

Louise bowed.

“I also need to apologize. I am sorry for borrowing your Familiar-san without permission and not explaining the circumstances.”

“Indeed. It was cruel to ignore me.”

Louise said dully.

“I did not want you to get too much involved. I needed to do a dirty job of setting traps… for the traitor…”

“The Royal Palace Judge was the traitor…”

Though Henrietta tried to keep it a secret… such secrets always seemed to leak somewhere. Richmon being an Albion spy was already a popular rumor in town.

Louise reared her head.

“However, I am not a child anymore. I can keep Princess–sama’s secrets. From now on, always tell me.”

Henrietta nodded.

"I see. Let's do it that way. Anyway, the only the people whom I am able to trust from the bottom of the heart… are the ones in this room.”

“Familiar too?”

Louise wondered. Henrietta and Saito's eyes met for a moment. After that, a light blush appeared on both their cheeks, and they mutually looked down.

“Y-yes… Naturally. Ah! That’s right! We still have not had a formal introduction!”

Henrietta, trying to change the topic, held out her hand towards Agnes.

“This is my trustful Musketeer Commander, Agnes Chevalier de Milan. Though she is a woman, she uses a sword and gun as skillfully as a man. She also punished splendidly the betrayer who was trying to run away. Without fear she stood against a mage with just a sword… A hero.”

“I am not a hero.”

Agnes brushed off the statement and returned to her cheerful expression again. Then she said in a smooth voice.

“Her Majesty, we don’t need the introduction. With Miss Vallière, we already had a relationship overnight.”

Louise blushed, remembering the kiss.

“I-it wasn’t like that!”

“That was an unforgettable night, right, Miss Vallière?”

Agnes said laughingly. Which made Louise blush even more.

“Unforgettable night?” Henrietta asked.

“Nothing, to trick the enemy's eyes we pretended to be lovers. We kissed! That was so funny! Ahahahaha!”

Agnes laughed happily.

Louise blushed more and more. She expected Saito to start making fun of her that she was kissed by a woman. However, he did not laugh.

Somehow awkwardly, he averted his eyes.

Louise glanced up at Henrietta. She as well was twining her fingers hesitatingly.

Besides, a little while ago when the eyes of these two met, they turned their faces down. A strange doubt… crept inside Louise.

“W-well then, since there are a few more things to do, we should get ready to leave, Agnes.”

Henrietta stood up.

“Eh? I thought we were going to have toasts all night long?"

“I’m worried about your wounds… Well then, Louise, I ask you to continue.”

Henrietta hurriedly left the room. Agnes, who seemed to be completely lost, followed.

Saito also stood up and tried to go out.

“There is no need to rush.”

Louise detained him. Feeling a dreadful premonition, Saito’s face turned pale.

“No, well, dish-washing…”

Saito said looking straight ahead. His voice trembled.

Louise smiled, however.

“Mm, sit. It is alright. Stay here until morning.”

She pointed to the bed. Slowly, Saito sat down. What happened, did she find out? Princess’s kiss… No, surely not… She would not be so calm, right?

T-that’s right. If she were aware, Louise would not take such an attitude. She would be countless times trampling on Saito’s face and saying,

‘You kissed the Princess didn’t you?’

Yet she was smiling. Maybe she really, without any ulterior motive, wanted to show appreciation to Saito’s misery.

“W-what is it? You are strangely gentle.”

“No, thank you for your hard work lately. I just want to express my gratitude. Really.”

Louise gave Saito a cup and poured in some wine.

“T-thank you.”

“Look, I…was just upset that the Princess did not need me. These two, no, three days I was in a bad mood… over this and that. But now I am back in high spirits! It’s alright again!”

Seeing that, Saito felt relieved.

Aaah, he just worried too much... *I'm so glad… She really seems to have recovered her good humor*.

“Was it hard to guard the Princess?”

Louise grasped Saito's hand.

“T-to some extent.”

Why is Louise so gentle? Aah, who cares, I haven’t felt so good in ages.

“As one would expect from my familiar! I am so proud!”

Saito started to boast.

“T-that was… a piece of cake. But we did it together…"

"Still, it was wonderful. The way that no one was able to find you, you must have really tricked the chasers, right?"

“T-that’s right.”

“Drink, drink. I’ll be doing the duty of a caring master today. I’ll be the waitress.”

After saying that, she refilled the cup with wine. Being flattered by Louise in

such a way, Saito’s confidence gradually grew.

“Saito is so wonderful! When he was suddenly walked in, he quick wittedly pretended to be the lovers and deceived them, right? You should have become an actor! You could have been Royal Tanaijiiru Theater’s main performer!”

“That’s right! Easy victory!”

Louise continued in the same way.

"Saito’s wonderful! Did he kiss the Princess?”

“That’s right!”

At that moment, the air froze.

Saito noticed that he was splendidly tricked. If you want to draw something out from the partner, first of all, you need to make him feel relaxed. The technique that Louise picked up in the bar! She used it!

Louise was using it every day, so her skills grew.

“L-Louise, this… Y-you… that…”

The tension in the room rose.

Then Louise stood up and locked the door.

Turning back, Louise said in a bright, even voice.

“Hey, dog.”

Dog.

In one breath the giddiness from the wine was gone.

Saito began to tremble.

Why is that dark aura emanating from Louise’s shoulders?

What is this dark aura?

“Dog, what’s wrong? Answer me!”

“W-woof!”

Tonight, ‘Dog’ surely sounded different. It was different. The presentiment of doom pierced through Saito's numb body. The taste of bitter despair filled his mouth.

“Excuse me. With magic or foot, which?"

“E-either seem painfuuuuul.”

“Sorry, it has to be painful. Now, make your decision, hurry.”

And so… it was going to be a long night.

Really long. And a long daybreak.

Assuming, that I can survive tonight…

And I should beware of all girls serving alcohol from now on, Saito thought.